



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? Editorials on the city of Wilson's zoning enforcement action against an artist's mural at Brewmasters, a local restaurant

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Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Under; average daily circulation is 11,500

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

In response to anonymous complaints, the city of Wilson's zoning department issued a violation notice to the Brewmasters restaurant in January 2017, finding that a mural painted by local artist Dave Matthews was an oversize sign rather than an art installation because the mural included the restaurant's name in block letters formed in the negative space between hundreds of intricate illustrations.

In a series of unsigned editorials, The Wilson Times identified various deficiencies with the city ordinance and explained that merely declaring a mural to be a sign does not deprive it of First Amendment protections extended to artists' original work. Since Brewmasters commissioned Matthews to design and create a mural entirely of his choosing and Matthews made the artistic choice to spelling out the business name in negative space as a way to unify the illustrations around a central theme, we argued that the mural was not intended as an advertisement and fails to meet the Supreme Court's three-prong test for commercial speech established in *Bolger v. Youngs Drug Products*.

Requiring a business to alter or remove a mural due solely to the mural's content when zoning ordinances allowed outdoor art installations violated the restaurant's and the artist's First Amendment rights, the Times argued. We are proud to defend free speech from government sanction and did so in this instance to great effect.

Brewmasters appealed the violation notice to the chief planning and zoning administrator. When the city's determination was upheld, the business appealed to the city zoning board and was again found to be in violation. Following the publication of Times editorials and a groundswell of public support during its meeting on Jan. 18, 2018, the Wilson City Council voted unanimously to alter its zoning ordinance, which saved the Brewmasters mural from enforcement action by subjecting it to a grandfather clause.

The Times helped to mobilize community members and educate local elected officials on art censorship, commercial speech and the First Amendment, facilitating a fair, lawful and constitutional outcome and saving a beloved local landmark from alteration or erasure.

Opinion

The Wilson Times

www.wilsontimes.com

MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER —
A COMMUNITY INSTITUTION SINCE 1896

The Wilson Times

Morgan Dickerman Publisher
Keven Zepezauer General Manager
Corey Friedman Editor
Lisa Boykin Batts Associate Editor

Thought for today

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Prayer: Dear God, fill our hearts with your peace and joy, and teach us to treat each day as a gift. Amen.

IN OUR OPINION

This mural inspires award-winning art. Will city censor it?

A three-judge panel has weighed in on the artistic merit of Brewmasters' mural, and the decision conflicts with Wilson city officials' claim that the art installation is merely an oversized sign.

No, the dispute between the popular brewpub and the city of Wilson hasn't reached a courtroom. The judges we're referring to are members of the Wilson Active Artists Association.

Their verdict, rendered not in a court of law, but in the Greenfield School's judged competition art show, cannot be appealed.

Callie Boyette, a Greenfield senior, won first place in the art show's cellphone photography competition for her picture of local artist Dave Matthews' colorful mural on Brewmasters' north-facing wall.

Judging the contest were Jane Gardner, a Jones Elementary art teacher for 13 years who writes and illustrates children's books; Aida Abernathy, an oil and acrylic painter who has worked in advertising and graphic design; and Parmalier Arrington, a Williams College art graduate who earned a \$22,000 fellowship to study in Japan.

It's the photograph, not the mural, that received the award. But clearly, the selection of this striking subject had something to do with the first-place prize.

Boyette's smartphone snapshot was taken at a diagonal angle so that the entire mural is included in the frame. Apart from the blue sky above it and the icy glaze on the parking lot beneath it, the mural in all its vivid color dominates the photo.

The winner plans to donate her framed photo to Brewmasters after the Wilson Arts Center exhibition closes on

June 24. Bad news delivered Tuesday could mean Boyette's picture may soon be all that remains of Matthews' original art.

Chief Planning and Development Officer Rodger Lentz has rejected Brewmasters owner Morkos Youssef's appeal of a Jan. 12 violation notice. Lentz says the mural violates city ordinances regulating business sign size.

At issue is whether Matthews' choice to use negative space in the mural to spell "Brewmasters" transformed a work of art into an advertisement.

Wilson's chief code enforcer hangs his heavy-handed decision on a faulty premise — he wrote that "the wall sign was created to advertise the business." That is demonstrably false and should render Lentz's ruling null and void.

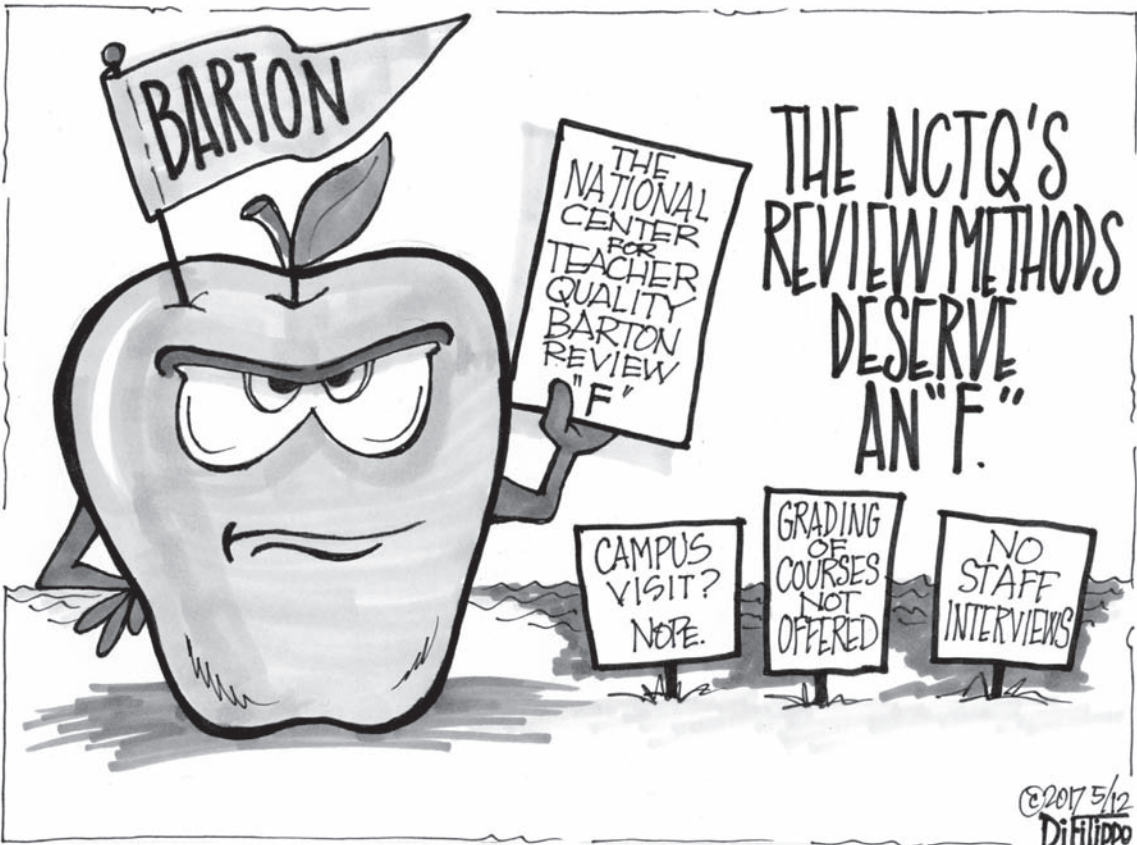
Owner Morkos Youssef did not plan, propose or pay for a wall sign to advertise his business, as Lentz could have easily found out. An ad would include Brewmasters' logo, branding and some enticement to visit the brewpub.

Youssef commissioned a mural and left the particulars to the painter he selected. Matthews decided on his own to form letters between hundreds of illustrations.

Lentz's order gives Brewmasters 30 days to either remove the lettering from its mural or appeal the decision to the city's Board of Adjustment. We hope the business chooses to press its case.

Wilson officials are not merely following the rules. They're asserting that they have unbridled discretion to categorize an artist's work as advertising, muddy the waters with semantics and exercise strong-arm censorship.

Matthews shouldn't need a sign permit to use artistic license.



LETTERS

Independents must stand up to two-party paradigm

Re: "Democrats should stop whining and work across the aisle," May 4:

I am kowtowed before I even begin. Mr. Arthur Tozzi uses his position to pontificate to all the lesser Americans about how we should be acting responsibly in support of the regime in the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. Mr. Tozzi is a master craftsman of the language, being a marketing graduate in his late seventies.

I am also an independent, but not a selectively uninformed one. That Mr. Tozzi can still be

doubting Obama's birthplace is nothing less than selective stupidity shared in unison by his golfing foursome, I have no doubt.

Fair to say, the Democrats are responding to Trump in the same manner that the GOP responded to Obama. Of course, Trump is a white man in the White House. That alone should support more allegiance in the mind of many, I'm sure. The aged and well-positioned are always in a better position to disperse truth, justice and the American way ideals.

While I do support your call for a more unified America, it cannot be all right wing any more than it can be all left wing. Our biggest national political problem is the encampment of the sheep into established party pens. Perhaps if more people would accept the challenge of

thinking for themselves and become independent by registration, the power of the DNC and GOP would go away. If citizens actually gave thought to what is important to them instead of responding to what some propaganda TV ad designed to stir the worst angels of our nature purports, to paraphrase Mr. Lincoln, then perhaps we could begin to make headway as a nation.

Meanwhile, we will play the popular attack game as designed by the multimillionaire-supported two-party system. We will attack a phrase here and an innuendo there to further divide ourselves. Come on, Tozzi. You're an educated man. Rise above this fray and give us the truth of what you would like America to be without benefit of party political positions.

Dave Hager Wilson

Trump: From fear to extremism and back



George Leach

On May 8, Americans were informed that President Donald Trump had dismissed James Comey, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Reasons for his dismissal have become the latest

firestorm in the Trump administration, as those reasons change from almost one day to the next.

This scenario is not new or unique for this president. It is "just the way he is" as his proponents give passes to his overreaches, inept actions, lack of common knowledge, failure to use common sense, opposition to traditional government and frequently unconstitutional executive orders.

It seems as if the Trump presidency was and is personal, a calculated risk he decided to take — win, lose or draw.

By winning, he could be the most powerful man in the world governing the most powerful nation in the world. By losing or ending in a draw, he could extend a personal opportunity, greater than ever, to expand his financial position in the world.

As the political scene is today, Trump has all but destroyed the established Republican Party, cast the Democratic Party in utter disarray, filled his Cabinet with billionaires like himself and aligned his foreign policy goals to fit and promote this nation's No. 1 enemy: Russia.

In addition, the nation's intelligence organizations and the National Security Agency consistently informed us that Russia

was tenaciously interfering with our nation's election processes. Many came to believe the Russians were attempting to sway the election in Donald Trump's favor. Others say there is no proof, but there are three investigations ongoing to determine who is right.

Now, the American people did not have all this information prior to Nov. 8, but we heard plenty in the campaign. On the morning of Nov. 9, Trump was declared the winner. How and why Trump won is still an enigma and is causing us to question some of our longstanding traditions.

Space will not allow me to cover the many factors of how and why Trump won. But let's start with two we know and have experienced but may not understand. Let's name backlash and hate.

A backlash occurs when there are steep or numerous changes in our society and/or culture. A very steep change was Barack Obama's election as president in 2008. Suddenly, America realized an African-American family would inhabit the White House and Obama, a "black" man, would govern America.

Hate that had been hidden from view became visible, widespread and focused on the recent change in government. Faith in hope and change began to decline. Members of Congress met and pledged to make Obama fail. Instead, he won a second term, and the backlash and hate grew deeper.

During Obama's second term, Fox News, led by Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity, The Heritage Foundation, ALEC and other tenacious conservative organizations moved the nation among

extremely partisan lines. In addition, this effort was assisted by Congress and its leaders John Boehner, Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan, who refused to pass any substantive legislation on pressing issues.

Two examples are immigration and an increase in wages. Conservative partisans touted excessive regulations, claiming they hampered business and eroded jobs. Manufacturing gave way to high technology and educational quality, especially in rural areas and impoverished cities, did not keep pace with technological needs.

Americans had become afraid and distrustful of government. They blamed Obama for the congressional gridlock and increasingly embraced an extreme conservative ideology. In that atmosphere, Sen. Ted Cruz successfully shut down the government.

Passed by only Democratic votes, the Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare, currently insures more than 20 million people. As the number of Americans with health insurance increased, the U.S. House voted 60 times to repeal what could be a para-universal health care program.

As the 2016 presidential campaign developed and the parties chose their standard bearers, Trump and Clinton, the door to no-holds-barred extremism swung wide open.

Unfortunately, Americans put aside our exceptionality, excused democracy and fairness, turned away from decency, morals and manners and excused the process of demonization. In so doing, we elected Donald J. Trump as president of the United States.

Letters to the editor

The Wilson Times welcomes opinions from readers on topics of public interest. Letters that promote a commercial product, contain either libelous material, personal attacks on individuals or vulgar language, and those addressed to a third party, will not be published. Consumer complaints and letters containing unverifiable factual claims are ineligible for publication. Letters should be no more than 350 words, must be signed and should include the writer's address. A telephone number, which will not be published, should be included for verification purposes. Letters selected for publication may be edited and all letters become property of The Wilson Times.

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Opinion

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Thought for today

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race ... yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.
(Ecclesiastes 3:9-11)

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust that you are always at work in our lives. Amen.

IN OUR OPINION

Wilson city officials must abandon bid to censor artist's work

Wilson's reputation as a premier visual arts community is on the line, and our elected and appointed city officials must seize their opportunity to preserve it.

Brewmasters has appealed its zoning violation order to the Wilson Board of Adjustment and will also seek an amendment to a city ordinance cited as the reason its colorful wall mural is being improperly judged as a sign.

Attorney Rhyan Breen, who represents the Forest Hills Road bar, restaurant and bottle shop, tells Times reporter Brie Handgraaf for a story on today's front page that Brewmasters will appeal Chief Planning and Development Officer Rodger Lentz's May 15 ruling.

Lentz determined negative space used to form the word "Brewmasters" between hundreds of intricate illustrations on the mural constitutes advertising, making the mural a business sign rather than an art installation. Signs require permits and lettering must meet rigid rules on size and scale, while artwork is not subject to such restrictions.

"We purposefully wanted to encourage more artistic murals and freedom of expression in noncommercial ways, so the only way it becomes non-exempt (from the sign restrictions) is when it includes commercial messages," Lentz told the Times.

It's true that, as Lentz noted, commercial speech enjoys less First Amendment protection than political speech. But the Brewmasters painting doesn't meet the legal definition Lentz seeks to apply.

In the 1983 case Bolger v. Youngs Drug Products, the U.S. Supreme Court developed a three-prong test for commercial speech — a message must be intended as an advertisement, reference a particular product and be disseminated

due to an economic motivation. On intent, the very first prong, Lentz's case for the mural as a commercial message falls apart.

Brewmasters owner Morkos Youssef had no designs on an extra sign. He commissioned artist Dave Matthews to paint a mural of his choosing, and Matthews came up with the concept to form uneven, graffiti-style block letters to connect his disparate illustrations, not to clamor for customers.

The legal precedent is clear — Matthews' mural simply doesn't qualify as commercial speech.

"More than anything, we want to preserve the integrity of the art and Dave's hard work," Breen said.

Lentz proposed filling in the letters in Matthews' mural. That would constitute art censorship, likely in violation of the First Amendment. Imposing that condition under threat of fine would be a staggering embarrassment to the city of Wilson, which prides itself on being a creative space.

The Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park, featuring a world-famous tinkerer's towering kinetic sculptures, is the centerpiece of downtown Wilson's revival. Censoring a mural would strip the city of credibility in matters of art and culture.

Board of Adjustment Chairman Allen Stallings and members Michael Reed, William H. Shreve, Rodney A. Denton and Judy Weatherington cannot allow that to happen.

Their decision in the Brewmasters case will reflect on the Wilson City Council, the elected board that names city residents to appointed panels. And if the board errs, Brewmasters can appeal to the full city council.

Will Wilson retain the right to market itself as a haven for art aficionados, or will it inflict irreparable harm to our civic identity?



LETTERS

The decadence of modern American culture

The recent non-fiction book — liberals call it fictional — "Guilty as Sin" by New York Times bestselling author Edward Klein describes the political and scandalous political path of main character Hillary Clinton and her husband Bill "Slick Willie" Clinton.

It all started in 1979 in the state of Arkansas and will never end as long as they live. Power and money fuels their passion. In their opinion, anything is cool except the violation of "political correctness," for which

the liberals will exercise their wrath with vengeance.

Some of Mr. Klein's statements about the degradation and destruction of our cultural virtues:

- Marriage has been redefined in a way that no previous generation of Americans would have recognized — and failure to affirm the new liberal order can lead to legal punishment.
- In many communities, the police, not the criminals, are considered the problem.
- Nearly a quarter of all Americans describe themselves as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular."
- More than half the births to women under 30 occur outside of marriage.
- We have an electronic "celebrity" devoid of standards that praises Kim Kardashian for balancing a champagne glass on her rear end; that canonizes Bruce Jenner, once the picture of masculinity, for changing his sex; where Summer's Eve feminine-care company runs a video

on its website and YouTube showing a talking vagina.

Mr. Klein states: "Do we really think that Hillary and her self-righteous left-wing advisers who reside on the east and west coasts have answers to these problems? They are so detached from the lives of everyday Americans that they neither understand nor have a workable solution for the ills that plague America."

Mr. Klein also discusses Jacques Barzun, the great educator, philosopher and writer.

"Like many intellectuals, Barzun started off as a liberal. His conversion to conservatism took place during the student protest in the late 1960s, when a mob held the dean of Columbia College hostage and invaded the university president's office and defecated on his desk." This is Clinton democracy in action.

This book is available at Wilson County Public Library.

Carl Hinson
Wilson

With quirky characters, Wal-Mart entertains



Joe Weaver

There is a website called "People of Wal-Mart" that features photos of strange sights at the store. Usually, the pictures are of someone scantily clad, or strangely dressed or both.

Occasionally, you might see something truly unusual like someone sleeping on a big bag of birdseed.

It's understood that this is Wal-Mart and this is, well, acceptable.

My wife and I shop at Wal-Mart often, and, like most Wal-Mart shoppers, we play the "Wal-Mart Bingo." It's a game where you have a little list of things you might see in the average shopping trip and you check them off to see whether you or your spouse wins.

If you have never played it, think of it as a low-rent "I Spy" mixed with alcohol and low self esteem.

There are the "givens." No matter where you are in the continental United States, there are things you will see in every Wal-Mart. These are the things or people that give Wal-Mart its reputation as the second most entertaining place in America, second only to Disney World.

Whatever the weather may be, there is always one woman in a tank top and flannel pajama pants with a cartoon character on them. Her hair is always in a messy bun or ponytail and she is sans upper undergarments.

Blue tank top and SpongeBob

bottoms? Check.

Yellow tank top and Betty Boop trousers? Yep.

My wife once saw a woman she swore was wearing nothing but a Harley-Davidson tank top and purple Reebok high tops. It was a false alarm as the sneakers were Converse and the "bottomless" was a pair of leggings that were about as close to flesh tone as they could be.

On Sundays, the folks who have just left church have shown up to do some shopping while they are in town. Often, they are an elderly couple with she in a flowered dress and incredibly potent perfume and he is hunched over in what looks like a brown suit from a distance but is slightly mismatched when you see it up close. His tie is crooked, but held against his shirt with a large gold-plated tie bar.

The Soccer Mom is there with all four of her kids, who are about two years apart. The oldest two are in athletic uniforms and the younger ones are sitting in the cart fighting over which of them gets to face forward.

The New Couple walks hand in hand through the food aisles, planning out the romantic dinner they are going to cook together. Usually, it's pasta of some sort, because it's easy and neither knows how to cook.

There is a guy who frequents our Wal-Mart who carries a gun. As a gun owner myself, I don't find this, itself, as anything unusual. A lot of people legally carry firearms and in this state, it is not unusual to see someone shopping with a gun on his or her hip. The guy

I mention dresses like a cowboy. Hat, spurs, chaps and big Western-style gun belt with a single-action revolver.

Picture Hopalong Cassidy with a plastic hand basket with three Lean Cuisines and a two-liter bottle of Mountain Dew.

Where we live, like most places, Wal-Mart is the social hub of the town. You run into just about everyone you know in Wal-Mart at one time or another. My wife seems to know everyone in town and a quick jaunt to Wal-Mart takes about an hour and a half. We are in there so frequently that we know a lot of the employees.

A smaller, groceries-only Wal-Mart opened up here in our town and we are known there as well. It's not as entertaining as the "big" Wal-Mart, but it has its moments. I once witnessed a guy try to carry 11 potatoes to the register without using a bag or basket. If you've ever tried to carry 11 potatoes, it's not easy and you will find yourself wrestling with errant spuds all the way to the register. He did use the self-service checkout instead of dumping his potatoes onto the conveyor belt.

If you happen to see us in Wal-Mart, come on over and say hello. We're always glad to stop and chat for a spell. We'll be easy to spot. My wife will be in a flowered dress, and I will be in a brown suit with a crooked tie.

Joe Weaver, a native of Baltimore, is a husband, father, pawnbroker and gun collector. From his home in New Bern, he writes on the lighter side of family life.

Letters to the editor

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Opinion

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IN OUR OPINION

Changing sign rules a win-win for Wilson, Brewmasters

As Wilson celebrates its signature folk art with the North Carolina Whirligig Festival this weekend, city leaders are considering a compromise that would preserve another piece of our artistic landscape.

By adopting a citizens’ amendment to the unified development ordinance that clarifies vague language delineating signs, advertisements and art installations, the Wilson City Council could put a merciful end to a censorship controversy swirling around Brewmasters’ mural on Forest Hills Road.

Council members on Thursday discussed language proposed by Brewmasters attorney Rhyan Breen that would define three terms in the city’s rulebook — “noncommercial,” “lawful noncommercial message” and “advertisement.”

Adding clear definitions would shield Brewmasters from zoning enforcement action that could require the popular restaurant, bar and craft beer shop to alter or remove the mural artist Dave Matthews painted on the side of its building. If adopted, the amendment will give businesses clear, reasonable guidelines on art installations and signs, preventing future mural misunderstandings.

Last year, Brewmasters owner Morkos Youssef commissioned Matthews to craft a custom creation along the wall facing

Dollar General. Matthews spent 42 hours drawing a prototype and invested more than 140 hours over 42 days painting the mural, which was completed around Halloween 2016.

The bone of contention is the large yellow letters spelling out “Brewmasters” in the negative space around hundreds of intricate illustrations. Wilson zoning officials say the business name constitutes a commercial message and transforms the mural into an oversize sign that breaks the city’s rules for advertising.

That simply doesn’t square with the U.S. Supreme Court’s definition of commercial speech, which is entitled to fewer First Amendment protections and subject to more regulation than artwork.

In a 1983 case, the high court established a three-prong test — a message must be intended as an advertisement, reference a particular product and be disseminated due to an economic motivation.

Matthews’ mural fails to satisfy two out of the three requirements. It was not intended as an ad; the concept of spelling out Brewmasters in the negative space was the artist’s, not the business owner’s, and the motivation was simply to unite the mural’s many illustrations around a central theme, not to drum up bar business.

The city sent Brewmasters a notice of violation on Jan. 12. Brewmasters appealed

and Chief Planning and Development Officer Rodger Lentz sided with his zoning staff in a May 15 decision. While we don’t begrudge Lentz his opinion, he was far from a neutral arbiter, making prejudicial statements that included pointedly calling the mural a sign — the very question the hearing was convened to determine.

Brewmasters appealed Lentz’s ruling to the Wilson Board of Adjustment. Plans for a hearing there have been on hold to allow city councilmen time to consider the citizens’ amendment, which Breen submitted on May 24.

The amendment would define “noncommercial” as “not having a commercial objective; not intended to make a profit,” “lawful noncommercial message” as “any message communicated that is not intended to make a profit and does not contain an advertising message” and “advertisement” as “a commercial message that provides a notice or announcement in a public medium promoting a product, service, event or business.”

The desired effect, Breen wrote in the amendment application, is to remove ambiguity.

“The language of the Uniform Development Ordinance is currently ambiguous and leaving the aforementioned terms undefined results in arbitrary and capricious enforcement of the code provisions,”

Breen wrote. “Clarity of code provisions should be and is tantamount to the enforcement of the Uniform Development Ordinance and the continued development of the City of Wilson.”

Dave Matthews’ mural does not meet the Supreme Court’s definition of commercial speech and would almost certainly be deemed artwork, not a business sign, if the dispute between Brewmasters and the city of Wilson were to reach a courtroom.

If the mural is art, then an order from city staff to alter or remove it is art censorship. First Amendment jurisprudence tends to frown on that sort of thing.

Wilson’s wise investment in the Vol-lis Simpson Whirligig Park is giving our city a positive reputation as a forward-thinking community that brings artists, art aficionados and businesses together. Fighting a long-running and likely ill-fated court battle to blot out a mural would ruin that reputation.

Amending the unified development ordinance allows the city of Wilson to leave the mural standing without bending its rules. It would be a win-win that preserves city officials’ right to enforce sign regulations so long as they conform to constitutional standards.

We endorse the citizens’ amendment and strongly urge the Wilson City Council to adopt it without delay.

All we need is just a little patience



JOE WEAVER

I am running out of patience.

It has been suggested that, as you get older, you develop more patience as you understand better what things should stress you and what things you should just shrug off. I have heard from those older than I that this heightened sense of patience is largely perceived by others as ignorance and is largely misunderstood.

I don’t think there is some secret society of incredibly patient old people and this development of patience is a bunch of bull.

I’m no more patient now than I was when I was, say, 25. My wife will tell you that I am most certainly less patient than I was in my twenties and even in my thirties. The argument she makes lately is I have absolutely no patience whatsoever. I think she’s wrong, but what do I know? I’m not entirely sure if I am running out of patience or people are just becoming more difficult and annoying.

A lot of the readers of this column probably think I am already a grouch. Admittedly, I come off as being curmudgeonly from time to time. Sometimes I can be perceived as irascible, difficult and argumentative. Well, part of that is by design. I think if I was cheerful and likable all the time, the column would get boring. I know for a fact the Facebook comments would be far less entertaining if I pleased everyone. That said, can we all be in agreement that this columnist is a bit difficult at times?

Is it really too much to ask for a little efficiency in the world? Is it too much to ask that a task that takes five minutes not take 20?

For example, I have been in McDonald’s restaurants all over the country and know for a fact that it does not take 10 minutes to assemble a Big Mac, put it in its little box, pair it up with an order of fries and toss it on a tray. Ray Kroc did not create a streamlined system only to have it derailed because the counter folks are too busy chatting about who was going out with whom.

Using that example, the guy behind the counter should not be too surprised when I am a little peeved when I get my food. I don’t care about who is dating whom, I just spent \$6 on lunch and I would like to have it while it was still relatively hot.

I have a long commute. Most of it is on a two-lane road that has a speed limit of 55 mph. It’s not a suggestion. If the speed limit is 55, drive 55.

Too often, I am stuck behind someone going 40 or 45. Not another car in sight, except for ones coming the other direction making it impossible for me to pass the slow car.

When I do pass, at the speed limit, there is always a dirty look from the other driver. A lot of the time, the other driver is doing something like talking on the phone or looking in the mirror on the sun visor.

I have a commute that takes about an hour if all goes well. If there is open road and no one in front of you, go the speed limit. I’m not asking you to speed. I’m not asking you to break the sound barrier, I just want to get home and have dinner.

A lot of you are thinking the same thing. I know a lot of you are thinking I just need to relax and be a little more patient. I understand your thinking. I would love to be a little more patient. I would love to not look at the clock in the car or not look at my watch while waiting for food. I can’t. I don’t think I ever will be able.

I wait until the last moment to write the column each week. That’s my fault. I don’t know any other way. I have a strict schedule on the nights I write the column. I eat dinner. Write the column. Submit the column. Spend time with my wife. I have most of the evening timed to the minute. Sometimes I surprise myself and wind up ahead of schedule.

I have some other things to do tonight after writing the column, but my wife isn’t ready. In this case, I probably should have a little patience.

Joe Weaver, a native of Baltimore, is a husband, father, pawnbroker and gun collector. From his home in New Bern, he writes on the lighter side of family life.



LETTERS

Trump supporters’ spin gets the facts wrong

It is a sad state of affairs that President Trump, the narcissistic leader of our nation, a pathological liar with a base mostly made up of Archie Bunker types who rely on the likes of Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and Lou Dobbs for their misguided, less-than-truthful rhetoric, and supported by fake news spewed out constantly by Fox News.

In letters to the editor of The Wilson Times published within the last couple of weeks, misleading and false statements abound.

First there was the false statement that Hillary Clinton sold 20 percent of our uranium reserves to the Russians, then in the same week, another false statement surely made in defense of Trump’s White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, whose false statements that U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson claiming “she got the money” for a memorial building dedicated to two slain FBI agents in her Florida district.

General Kelly never rescinded his false accusation — he just let the lie stand.

This false statement was followed by another lie that Rep. Wilson never used the names of

the two slain FBI agents: Benjamin Grogan and Jerry Dove. This statement was not true, for Rep. Wilson gave the speech at the dedication of the building named for these two slain agents.

Just this week in another letter contained false and misleading statements, one that Obama gave to the Iranians \$1.4 billion of taxpayers’ money — not true.

The first payment consisting of \$500 million was made in foreign currency, and the balance paid at a later date was also foreign currency, not American taxpayer money. All funds belonged to the Iranian government, and had

been held under sanctions imposed by the UN, and the return of funds was part of the Iranian nuclear deal.

Moving to another troubling statement, this one made recently by President Trump. In a question-and-answer press session held on the White house lawn, the president referred to our national military as his, using the words “my generals, and my military” — and if that statement doesn’t scare the be-Jesus out of you, it should.

William T. “Nick” Smith
WILSON

Tell us what’s on your mind

The Wilson Times welcomes opinions from readers on topics of public interest. Letters that promote a commercial product, contain either libelous material, personal attacks on individuals or vulgar language, and those addressed to a third party, will not be published. Consumer complaints and letters containing unverifiable factual claims are ineligible for publication. Letters should be no more than 350 words, must be signed and should include the writer’s address. A telephone number, which will not be published, should be included for verification purposes. Letters selected for publication may be edited and all letters become property of The Wilson Times.

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THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind and . . . strength. . . Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:30-31)

PRAYER: Dear God, help us learn to love ourselves so that we may live out your command to love our neighbors. Amen..

Opinion

The Wilson Times

MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER — A COMMUNITY INSTITUTION SINCE 1896

Morgan Dickerman PUBLISHER
Keven Zepezauer GENERAL MANAGER

Corey Friedman EDITOR
Lisa Boykin Batts ASSOCIATE EDITOR

THOUGHT FOR TODAY

This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble. (Psalm 34:6)

PRAYER: Dear Father, thank you for the privilege and responsibility of prayer. May we use our difficulties as a way to encourage others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

IN OUR OPINION

Wilson council: save mural from city censorship

Eleven large letters and hundreds of intricate illustrations served as the eye chart in a public policy vision test this week.

Six members of the Wilson Planning and Design Review Board flunked the exam, showing themselves to be hopelessly shortsighted.

They couldn’t see the big picture — and we don’t mean the mural at the center of an art censorship controversy that’s giving the city of Wilson a bad name.

The planning board voted Tuesday to redefine signs and art installations in the unified development ordinance, but the panel rejected a compromise endorsed by Wilson city planners that would leave Dave Matthews’ mural on the exterior wall of Brewmasters undisturbed.

In late 2016, the gastropub commissioned Matthews to paint the panoramic mural. He made the artistic choice to cover the wall with colorful characters and use the negative space between illustrations to spell “Brewmasters” in uneven block letters, uniting the paintings around a common theme.

Wilson zoning officials said the presence of the business’ name makes the mural a sign and issued a notice of violation in January 2017, ordering it to be altered or removed. Rhyan Breen, attorney for Brewmasters and owner Morkos Youssef, submitted a citizens’ amendment requesting vague terms in the ordinance to be defined.

City staff under the direction of Chief Planning and Development Officer Rodger Lentz wrote their own tweaks to the rule-book. The new regulations would limit lettering to 100 square feet for murals as well as signs, but they include a grandfather clause for “vintage original art murals” installed prior to the rules’ adoption.

That clause would shield Matthews’ mural from censorship, and Lentz and his colleagues deserve credit for reaching a prudent compromise. The planning board went rogue and threw the win-win scenario out the window by voting to strike the grandfather clause from the ordinance.

Wilson will violate the First Amendment if it orders so much as a dab of paint removed. Municipal sign ordinances regulate advertising, or what the U.S. Supreme Court terms “commercial speech.” Murals containing artistic and political speech enjoy constitutional protection from such rules.

City officials said the word “Brewmasters” transformed the mural into an advertising sign as if it were a magical incantation. Using the business name as a bright-line test may sound logical to some, but it’s a make-believe standard devoid of any legal weight.

In the 1980 Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. v. Public Service Commission case, Supreme Court justices found that commercial speech is “expression related solely to the economic interests of the speaker and its audience.” The 1983 Bolger v. Youngs Drug Products case refined that definition further, establishing a three-prong test for commercial speech under which the Brewmasters mural would be definitively labeled art, not advertising.

A city ordinance doesn’t trump the Bill of Rights — it’s the other way around. The planning board seems to think we live in the People’s Republic of Wilson rather than Wilson, North Carolina, USA.

If the city council continues down the planning board’s reckless path, the road to resolution could run through a courtroom, with Wilson taxpayers footing the bill for an ill-fated fight against free speech. That would be nothing less than an outrage, while the current state of affairs is merely an embarrassment.

With the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park and Eyes on Main Street outdoor photo festival, Wilson has hitched its wagon to the visual arts for tourism and economic development. Promoting folk art and photography in one breath and censoring a mural in the next is positively schizophrenic.

The Wilson City Council is scheduled to consider the planning board’s recommendation at its Jan. 18 meeting. A vote to restore the grandfather clause wisely drafted by city staff would put this issue to rest.

If you agree that your tax dollars shouldn’t be used to censor artwork, call or email your councilman and ask him to #SaveDave — preserve Matthews’ mural, rescind the violation notice and stand up for artists’ freedom of speech.

The city of Wilson posts council members’ contact information on its website to help residents reach their elected officials. We’re providing it here for your convenience:

- Mayor Bruce Rose, 252-237-6750, brose@wilsonnc.org
- District 1 Councilman A.P. Coleman, 252-237-3284, coleman021@myglnc.com
- District 2 Councilman Michael Bell, 252-315-5654, mbell@wilsonnc.org
- District 3 Councilman Tom Fyle, 252-243-2996, tom_fyle@yahoo.com
- District 4 Councilman James Johnson, 252-230-9281, jamesmjohnsoniii@myglnc.com
- District 5 Councilman Donald Evans, 252-237-0417, devans@evansmachinery.com
- District 6 Councilman Logan Liles, 252-292-2075, loganliles@myglnc.com
- District 7 Councilman Derrick Creech, 252-315-3768, ddcrech52@hotmail.com



LETTERS

Wilson community made red kettle drive a success

Serving others without discrimination through Jesus Christ is exactly what happened when our community stepped up to the plate to give to our 2017 Red Kettle Campaign. With your contributions, we not only reached our goal of \$100K, but we topped it for a grand total contribution of \$102K!

The Salvation Army’s Red Kettle Campaign is a valued tradition in our community, and with several obstacles surrounding our campaign this year, you, the citizens of Wilson, made it happen, and for that we want to say a great big THANK YOU!

From a few coins out of the pocket to thousand-dollar checks, your donations help keep the lights on for struggling families, provide nutritious food for the hungry and will help pay the rent when personal disaster strikes. And, it makes Christmas happen for families and seniors all over Wilson County who would otherwise go without!

There are so many thank yous, but several need to be recognized for their values during our campaign.

To Megan Lively, market-

ing director for the Shoppes of Brentwood, to allow us to kick off the kettle drive at the Brentwood tree-lighting ceremony. This will become our kickoff site in the coming years.

To Jeremy Munn, manager of Leonard Buildings and Truck Accessories, for loaning us the pink house which became known as the Elf House, collecting toys and contributions.

To the elf himself, Mr. Gary Proffitt, for your countless hours of volunteering and planning.

To The Kathy Lineberger Team, Chesson Agency, Southern Bank, Gracies and the YMCA for collecting toys for us as a drop-off site.

To all of the kettle locations for allowing us to ring the bell: Belk, Marshalls, Food Lion locations, Harris Teeter, Hobby Lobby, Lowe’s, Parker’s, Piggly Wiggly, Walmart locations, Gracies, Downtown Wilson and the Elf House.

To all of those from the Advisory Board, churches, civic organizations, Boy Scout Troop 8, Wilson Police Department and private citizens for “adopting” a kettle for a day or more.

To Sheila Vick, Southern Container, for donating the hundreds of quality boxes for our


Angel Tree warehouse distribution center. To all of the above, thank you!

Special thank you to the American Legion for the use of its facilities during Angel Tree distribution and all “Double the Kettle Day” donors: Triangle East Storage, attorney Jim Rogerson, Joyner’s Funeral Home, Bridgestone/United Way, Miss Kitty, Fancy Home Products, attorney Will Farris, Mary Beth and Steve Coyte, Andrews Properties, State Farm (Chuck Finklea) First Wilson Properties, Southern Bank, Gallery of Flowers, Larry & Company and Classic Antiques & Hot Rods.

A very special thanks to The Wilson Times for your unwavering coverage and support during this season! It was a Merry Christmas indeed for so many in Wilson County and we pray for a Happy New Year to all our friends. For those who find themselves needing us, we say thank you in advance to those who help support us!

Lt. Jake Law
WILSON
The writer is pastor and corps officer of The Salvation Army of Wilson.

Snow days provide portal to the ‘80s


JOE WEAVER

A lot of us in my part of the state got hammered by a winter storm last week. This part of the country is unaccustomed to ice and snow and because of this, I got a few days off. Who wouldn’t take a few days off?

I wound up with Thursday and Friday off, and since I had the weekend scheduled off, I was rewarded with four days with the family. In the house. Unable to go anywhere.

I’ll be honest with you, I don’t really enjoy sitting around doing nothing. I need to be doing something pretty much all of the time. My wife told me this was fate and life was telling me I had to slow down and actually take a few days to sit in my recliner and do nothing.

I watched movies in the morning. In the afternoons, my wife and I binge-watched old television shows on Netflix and Amazon. I would like to say we watched things of educational, social and intellectual importance, but I would be lying more than a politician looking for votes.

My wife and I got our snacks and hit the couch. I asked my wife if she had seen this show and that and she said she had not. She was too young when they were broadcast originally and her parents did not allow her to watch them.

Challenge accepted.

This is the tale of how my wife got hooked on — well, no, actually obsessed with — “Dynasty.”

I am not talking about the current reboot. I am talking about the lurid, obnoxious, cliched and hilariously shoulder-padded nighttime soap opera classic.

We were awash in diamonds and champagne and whisked away to a time that never really existed. I was old enough in the ‘80s to remember them and I do not recall them being that decadent. At least for me they weren’t.

Within three episodes, my wife was sucked in to the backstabbing, lying, scandal, adultery and such that enthralled audiences more than 30 years ago. She would ask me which character would do what when they found about this person and that person. She was nervous when one character would have to confess something to his father, knowing darn well that the father would not take it very well.

She began to guess, sometimes accurately, the fates that would befall some characters. She liked one character and not another and would loudly exclaim her thoughts about them to the television as if they could hear her.

These people were not her friends, not even real people, but on these snow days, we spent more time with the Carrington and Colby families than with anyone else.

I had not seen the show in more than 30 years and I don’t recall seeing any of the last few

seasons. I know a lot of the readers of this column are of a, well, mature age and watched the show when it was originally on television. Take a moment and remember the shock and surprise you felt when you saw and heard some of the stuff coming from your television on Wednesday nights way back when.

What I find amusing about the show was it was peppered with dialogue that, even in our more permissive times, folks would find controversial. My wife was quite surprised that it was broadcast on television in a less permissive time. It’s campy and ridiculous now, but in 1982, it was quite something. Escapist entertainment in high style for the era. We’ve spent more than a few nights watching. We usually can get three or so episodes in each night and we are working our way through the end of the second season right now. Imagine my delight when my wife reminded me that there were nine total seasons. I know what’s coming in later seasons and if my wife thinks it’s goofy now, she has another thing coming.

Carringtons and Colbys aside, hysterical blindness and infidelity and catfights with wealthy women also aside, this has afforded us well-deserved downtime. This is time we have spent together, mutually enjoying something and having a good time that doesn’t cost anything.

Above all, that’s what’s important. That, and whatever Cecil Colby is scheming against Blake Carrington.

Opinion

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THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. (Psalm 119:105)

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for the Bible and your guidance through it. May its words become an even brighter lamp, guiding us every day. Amen.

IN OUR OPINION

Will city councilmen heed Wilson’s wishes and save the mural?

Will the Wilson City Council earn widespread praise for saving an artist’s work from destruction?

We may find out this evening when the council is scheduled to consider the fate of artist Dave Matthews’ mural on the exterior wall of Brewmasters at 2117 Forest Hills Road.

Councilmen are scheduled to vote on a misguided recommendation from the Wilson Planning and Design Review Board that would change city regulations for murals and definitively declare Matthews’ artwork out of order. As of press time, the meeting was still planned for 7 p.m., though winter weather could cause a postponement.

The planning board’s suggestion runs counter to public sentiment and risks not only alienating the majority of Wilsonians, but starting a First Amendment fight over artistic freedom. Appointed boards are, for both good and ill, insulated from voters’ demands. But the buck stops with our elected city council.

Brewmasters owner Morkos Youssef commissioned Matthews to design and paint a mural on the side of his popular Wilson restaurant in late 2016. Matthews used negative space between illustrations to spell out “Brewmasters” in uneven block letters. The original artwork was a hit, but some anonymous folks complained, prompting a Wilson Planning and Development staff review.

The city issued Brewmasters a violation notice in January 2017, finding that the gas-tropub’s mural violated the city sign ordinance. Officials labeled the mural a sign because Wilson’s definition of art and architectural features that don’t require a permit stipulates such objects “do not contain advertisements, trademarks, moving parts or lights.”

Wilson city planners charged that the use of the business name constitutes an advertisement even though Brewmasters’ logo and typography weren’t used, nor did the mural contain any advertising message. If an artist’s choice to use a business name automatically transforms art into an ad, it only does so in city officials’ imagination. That standard was invented on the spot and has no legal foundation.

Upon a citizens’ amendment request filed by Brewmasters

attorney Rhyan Breen, Chief Planning and Development Officer Rodger Lentz rewrote the rules. The draft ordinance limits the size of text for both signs and murals to 100 square feet or 20 percent of overall size, whichever is greater. Lentz included a grandfather clause that would categorize Matthews’ creation as a “vintage original art mural” and not require it to conform to the new standard.

In a fit of pique, the planning board rejected the grandfather clause and approved the remainder of the rewritten ordinance. If city councilmen go along with its recommendation, Brewmasters’ mural will be retroactively judged as noncompliant.

This boils down to the will of the people. Most Wilsonians don’t want the city government operating on their dime to bring the full weight of bureaucracy to bear against a small business that’s done nothing but make our community brighter — through its mural and its volunteerism.

Brewmasters’ Adopt-a-Classroom drive collects more than \$20,000 worth of supplies for Wilson County schoolteachers each year. The restaurant is a perennial sponsor of worthy causes, a good corporate citizen by any measure.

It gave Dave Matthews a blank canvas to showcase his creative vision. The message the mural expresses is his, not Brewmasters’. Yet when city officials stepped in, the business bore the cost of defending Matthews’ artwork from government-ordered erasure.

That struck the planning board as defiant. It strikes us as heroic.

Now it’s our proud public servants’ chance to save the day.

It’s the political equivalent of a chip shot, a layup — one of the easiest decisions a councilman can make. Letting the mural stand undisturbed harms no one, makes a whole lot of people happy and fulfills the city of Wilson’s vision as an art-centric community.

At last count, 1,613 people have signed an online petition to save the mural from removal or alteration. Hundreds more have weighed in with supportive comments on WilsonTimes.com and on the Times’ Facebook page.

Most are Wilson residents. Many are registered to vote. Wilsonians have spoken loud and clear. Is the city council listening?



LETTERS

Due process drowned out in #MeToo chants

Many have hailed Oprah Winfrey’s speech at Hollywood’s latest self-adulation ceremony as presidential. Praising women who have come forward to accuse their male oppressors, Oprah envisioned a “new horizon” for women. The crowd was moblike in its response echoing the sentiment that basic civil rights should be suspended in order to encourage women to come forward.

For the audience, the speech was wildly inspirational. For a grandfather of grandsons, the message was bone-chilling.

One does not have to be an expert in Freudian psychology to posit for every woman-hater there is probably a man-hater. Has Hollywood forgotten the injustice perpetrated in the name of political correctness at Duke University? Without due process exposing corruption from accus-

er to prosecutor, three grandson would be serving their 10th year of a 30-year sentence.

The Obama administration’s disdain for the rule of law and willingness to suspend civil rights to accommodate extreme agendas is now a matter of history. Revising Obama-era policies on campus sexual assault under Title IX by the secretary of education is not only another repudiation of the Obama administration, but also a relief to grandfathers and grandmothers with grandsons and granddaughters.

Joe Exum
SNOW HILL

Don’t force Medicare Part B on postal retirees

As a member of the federal community who served our country for years, I am concerned with an attempt to force current U.S. Postal Service retirees onto Medicare Part B, after

they previously declined this coverage. While hailed as a way to improve USPS’ finances, this is nothing more than balancing the books on the backs of seniors.

Why should retirees, who spent their careers serving this nation, be forced to pay an additional \$134 per month, or more, for health coverage they previously deemed unnecessary? Mandatory Medicare Part B coverage was never part of the agreement made upon employment, and it should not be forced on any postal retiree, especially retroactively.

Congress is currently attempting to fix the U.S. Postal Service’s problems by shifting costs to Medicare. I urge our legislators to reject the current postal reform bill, H.R. 756. Retired postal workers proudly served our community and promises to them should be kept.

Christine Edmunds
WARRENTON

Tree has long roots in Wilson’s history



KEITH BARNES

Recently my wife Gale and I were traveling along Ward Boulevard near Winstead Elementary School in Wilson when she noticed the large oak tree standing at the far back side of the

playground.

I was watching the road as Gale commented on how big the tree was, so I glanced over to get a look for myself.

Although I had seen the tree many times, especially during 1954-60 when I was a grammar school student at Winstead, I had not paid much attention lately to how huge it had gotten.

It’s one of those things, like an old service station or abandoned tobacco barn, that you might pass by every day without thinking about it and take it for granted.

My reaction upon seeing the tree this time, however, was one of amazement.

This tree was humongous, quite possibly as large as any I’ve ever seen in person.

I still live in Wilson and although Winstead School has changed slightly over the years, it is still in operation in the same place it has always been.

I may have passed by the school 100,000 times in my car without noticing the tree for more than a couple of seconds at a time, as its location does not allow for a safe place to pull off the road and observe.

My curiosity was piqued, so I called Wilson County Schools’ central office to see if I could go out and take a closer look at the tree.

After permission was granted I headed to Winstead armed with a camera, a tape measure and grammar school memories.

Winstead Principal Tracy Joyner met me in the office and led me out onto the playground.



Keith Barnes leans on the trunk of a towering, century-old tree on the grounds of Winstead Elementary School that measures nearly 34 feet at its base. Contributed Photo

I took a photo of the tree but realized someone needed to be in the picture to give it scale and perspective.

Thus, I handed the camera to Joyner and went over to lean up against the tree while she took the picture.

I measured the tree’s circumference and it was almost 34 feet at the base.

Nostalgia kicked for me in and I recalled the tree as being a great gathering spot when I was at Winstead along with providing plenty of shade around the home plate area during softball games.

We turned flips on the nearby monkey bars and the hard-packed dirt surface around the tree was great for playing marbles.

Some classmates even tried

climbing the tree — but without much luck.

Climbing it today would be extremely dangerous if not impossible as it must be at least 100 feet tall with the lowest branches over 20 feet off the ground and too big around for getting a good climbing grip.

Winstead School was built in 1918 and the tree, based on its size now, was likely already in the ground at that time and much smaller.

That could also mean there is a possibility it could have been climbed by my daddy Carl Barnes, while he was a student at Winstead during 1926-30.

You just never know.

Keith Barnes is a Wilson journalist, storyteller and author who serves as news editor for the Kenly News.

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THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Paul wrote, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which [God] has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people." (Ephesians 1:18)

PRAYER: O God, illumine our minds and hearts with your words so that we may gain a better understanding of you and your will for our lives. Amen.

IN OUR OPINION

Council earns cheers for voting to preserve Brewmasters mural

Donald Evans had a road-to-Damascus moment Thursday night. The District 5 city councilman initially opposed a tweak to Wilson's unified development ordinance with a grandfather clause that would preserve Dave Matthews' mural at Brewmasters, but a chorus of concern from city residents changed his mind. "My hat's off to the Matthews fellow for being able to do something like that on the scale of the whole side of the building," Evans said. "... It takes someone with an artistic mind to do all that work."

He'd done his share of soul-searching, driving to Brewmasters and examining the mural himself earlier in the day. The experience made an impression, but it was the impassioned pleas from fellow Wilsonians that won him over. "When I came to our meeting tonight, I was against the grandfather clause," Evans said. "But I'm here to make a motion tonight that we accept the amendment with the grandfather clause, and that would be my motion."

Those words — punctuated by spontaneous applause from residents in the packed council chambers — set the Wilson City Council on the right path forward.

Councilmen had wrestled with the question of whether Wilson needed a new sign and mural ordinance at all and whether it should include the grandfather clause, which the Planning and Design Review Board voted to strike. For much of the 90-minute public hearing, the skepticism was evident.

"In the beginning, I did not see this concluding in our favor, but I'm glad everyone put on their common-sense hats and reached this resolution," said Brewmasters owner Morkos Youssef. "I'm glad this is over with."

The feud over Matthews' mural incorporating the word "Brewmasters" in negative space between illustrations and whether it's a work of art, which the previous ordinance allowed, or an advertisement, which it prohibited, has been brewing for a full year. If city leaders hadn't acted, it could have dragged on for a decade.

Brewmasters attorneys Rhy-an Breen and Will Farris noted the First Amendment issues involved with city government ordering the erasure of an artist's work. If the council

couldn't make peace with the mural, Farris vowed to fight all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court to protect Matthews' freedom of speech.

"I don't think it is prudent for us to move toward litigation when we can find a solution," said District 2 Councilman Michael Bell, earning a hearty round of applause. "It makes no sense. We need all the money that we can get to stay here."

Wilson residents made their voices heard, and in the end, that made all the difference. It was a genuine grassroots endeavor — though Brewmasters rallied its troops, many citizens who attended and spoke during the public hearing had no connection to the business. They just wanted their hometown to thrive and prosper.

Thanks to their persuasive efforts, the Wilson City Council made the right call.

While we credit the groundswell of public support with saving the mural, we can't diminish our city councilmen's role or say enough about their authentic deliberations.

It's OK that council members opposed the new ordinance and grandfather clause at first. They needed to grapple with the complex issues involved, and they did so in real time with admirable candor and poise.

They struggled with this decision, concerned about its impact on the city's rulebook. And in the end, they arrived at the correct conclusion. The process worked.

We've criticized the council at times — it's the newspaper's job to hold public officials accountable — but today we offer nothing but praise.

Thank you, Councilmen A.P. Coleman, Michael Bell, Tom Fyle, James Johnson, Donald Evans, Logan Liles and Derrick Creech. Thank you, Mayor Bruce Rose.

The unanimous vote to adopt the ordinance with the grandfather clause received a raucous cheer and a partial standing ovation. Our city council deserves the applause.

Wilson can once again tout that we're a forward-thinking city steeped in art and culture. We have the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park. We have the Eyes on Main Street outdoor photography festival. We have the Arts Council of Wilson and Theatre at Barton.

And we have Dave Matthews' mural. It's here to stay.



LETTERS

Prohibition era ends in Wilson

Prohibition has ended! Hoist your glass of beer.

The Wilson City Council has unanimously recognized that the sign — art — will stay.

Great job, Rhyan Breen and Will Farris. And a shout-out to Paula Michalak for getting all the "grandstanders" on the council to finally make a decision and vote on it.

Mike Radford
WILSON

City council plays Pilate, washes its hands of the rules

Mr. Youssef states "In the beginning, I did not see this concluding in our favor..." I am confused with his beginning.

Was the beginning when he decided he would hire someone

to create this advertising poster, or was it after the so-called art was started and finished? I am wondering also if "in the beginning" Mr. Youssef had any inkling that this sign was probably illegal and should be checked out by his legal advisers.

It seems that Mr. Youssef's business has become quite popular and successful and with the oratory backing of The Wilson Times and all his favorable customers, his future is bright. Anyone who can beat a law etched in granite is bound for success. Maybe!

The City Council must have suspected that riots were going to developed if this quandary wasn't settled so as Pilate washed his hands of the matter, the City Council released Barnabas to the crowd. You would think that this anxious group would stand behind the very laws that they are sworn to uphold.

The Wilson Times was the

surprise of my life. It seems that they took a page from The News & Observer and went wild to justify this illegal sign.

Ashley Coley, a bartender at Brewmasters states. "I believe Brewmasters has brought innovation to Wilson." Well, now isn't that nice? Every bar and tavern would have a circus-type adverting sign on at least one side of the building. Who knows, pretty soon Wilson might innovate to the draft beer capital.

I suppose Mr. Lentz might as well look for another position. He is going to get bored sitting at his desk all day with nothing to do since the citizens of Wilson are going to overrule his specialized decisions.

The law is the law and we cannot survive democracy with the ruling of the City Council on Thursday.

Carl Hinson
WILSON

Saying goodbye to a living room companion



JOE
WEAVER

The time has come where I have to bid farewell to a beloved member of the family. A member who has been there through good and bad, thick and thin, and everything

in between. A family member who has been present for accomplishments and milestones and mishaps and tragedies.

It is time to bid adieu to the stalwart soldier of our household that is my recliner.

My recliner wasn't new when we got it. When it came to live with us, it was a recliner of decent quality that had been well used in its former home. Its original owner had passed away and his wife had moved and the recliner was up for adoption. Not really needing one, but wanting one, we adopted the recliner as our own and brought him home.

He was positioned in a corner of our living room, near a window that shone bright light. Murphy, our elderly cat at the time, chose the chair as hers and would curl on a blanket in the sunlight and nap quietly for most of the day. It was in this very chair that Murphy breathed her last breath and passed away a number of years ago. Cooper, Murphy's successor, never really cared much for the recliner and it wound up mine by default.

I had never had a recliner of my own, and I can't really remember one being in any house I grew up in. I guess we just weren't recliner people. I gave the chair a try and I wasn't instantly impressed. It was only after we rearranged the furniture in the living room

All but one of these columns was written in the recliner.

and moved the recliner from the corner that I really gave it a chance.

My wife had noticed I was watching television from the couch with my feet up on the coffee table. She "suggested" that I get my feet off the table and try the recliner.

Positioned in front of the TV, adjacent to the couch, I found my "spot."

All but one of these columns was written in the recliner. Hours upon hours of television have been viewed while my feet have been lifted on the footrest. A vast library of books have been read in the chair.

I have celebrated joy in the chair. I have suffered great loss in this chair. Birthdays and Christmases have come and gone and the chair was always there.

It's kind of silly, when you really think about it, to be going on about a piece of furniture. It's a metal frame, with some wooden supports and foam rubber and tan fabric. It's not made of the finest leather. A fortune was not paid for it even when it was new. There is a reassuring and welcoming groove in the seat from where I have gotten comfortable.

This weekend, it goes away. A friend is coming to the house to help me get it out of the living room and into our minivan so I can drive it to its final resting place in the dump. Sure, I could repair it and maybe get another couple of months out of it before it breaks again. I've decided it's not worth the trouble. To the county dump it goes, its usefulness having come to an end.

I'm not going to go shopping

for another one. I don't like the hard-sell tactics of furniture stores and I don't seem to like anything that isn't expensive. I don't want cupholders. I don't need massaging heated cushions. I don't need the chair to have Wi-Fi or stereo speakers.

About a year or so ago, a friend moved out of her house and gave us a chair from her living room. It's got a patch on the one arm where her cat decided to surgically probe inside and there is a little stuffing hanging out. It's wide, it's comfortable and it's a kind of tan color that is a little darker than my old recliner, but it's acceptable. The footrest and its wooden handle work just great.

I'm going to move it to my side of the living room. My old recliner, with its wobbly left arm and broken footrest, is being put to rest. I'm hoping the replacement recliner will be up to the task of being my main seat in the living room. I've been sitting in the old one still and I have occasionally forgotten that the footrest is broken until I work the lever and the chair violently cants to one side and the footrest comes out all crooked and won't retract.

The replacement will take some time to get used to. I believe I'll get used to it as it gets used to me.

It came from a home of warmth. I hope it understands it came into one as well.

Joe Weaver, a native of Baltimore, is a husband, father, pawnbroker and gun collector. From his home in New Bern, he writes on the lighter side of family life.

Tell us what's on your mind

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