

What matters in **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** Camden County

With tensions rising between law enforcement and citizens across the nation, it was not surprising that many were nervous about the Black Lives Matter-inspired in St. Marys last weekend.

We use the word “inspired” because the local Black Lives Matter event was a grassroots effort that was not affiliated with protests held in other areas of the country. Rather, it was more reflective of the local community and the attitudes here.

Organizers of the local protest and march said they welcomed anyone with an opinion and therefore the signs and sentiments expressed at the event came from individuals, rather than the group.

Despite the concerns that were evident among the protesters, they came together in unity and expressed their opinions civilly and peacefully. And while there were a few signs to the contrary, the prevailing attitude toward our local law enforcement officers was positive and respectful.

Other such marches in the U.S. have been marked with violence, property damage and speech designed to incite more of the same. Marches are more likely to be volatile in communities that have dysfunctional relationships between law enforcement and citizens. Fortunately, that does not describe Camden County.

Several years ago, a local man and his family brought an accusation of excessive force against the Kingsland Police Department. Evidence from the investigation showed the officer was justified, but the conversation grew beyond that complaint into a series of county-wide meetings between citizens, law enforcement, elected officials and clergymen.

That is an example of how our community has been and can be proactive in having a rational, meaningful dialogue about race and public policy before problems get out of hand.

Many of those who marched locally on Saturday were young people who are still trying to find their voice and channel their passion into something that makes a difference. While they may not be as savvy about conveying their messages, they are the future of America. We should applaud their desire to make a difference in the world — so long as they can do so peacefully and productively.

Perhaps we can all agree that stereotypes don’t advance the conversation in either area. Not all protesters are violent and not all police officers are prejudiced, but we can’t be afraid to talk to one another, even when we disagree.

Regardless of whose lives we are talking about, tolerance for other opinions and a willingness to come together also need to be part of the message. It certainly was part of the message in St. Marys last weekend.

Why are wary of ambitious plans?

Dear Editor,
As I’ve been reading the previous letters to the editor by opponents of the Spaceport Camden project here in our community, I can’t help but wonder if they realize how much their opposing opinions would stifle innovation and economic prosperity for our region.

Our leaders and citizens have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to make history and create something purposeful for our region that could benefit future generations for decades to come.

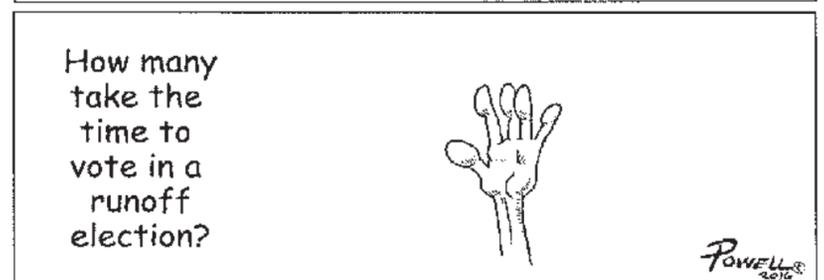
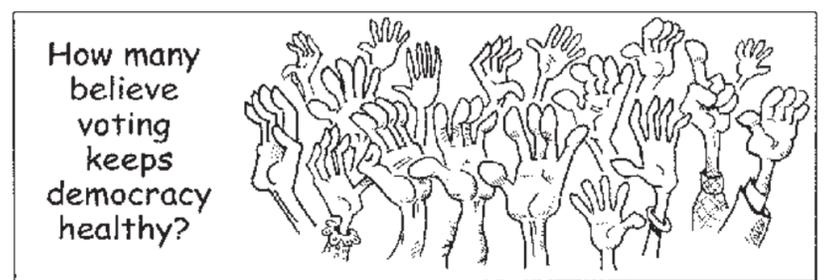
But instead I’ve been reading letters here in our local paper accusing the county of “wishful thinking.”

When did we become too afraid to make ambitious plans? Imagine if we had acted like this during the first space race, or during the early stages of commercial aviation?

We’d still be driving from New York to Los Angeles and would’ve never set foot on the moon!

According to a recent study, the economic impact of NASA’s Wallops Flight Facility was more than \$800 million, \$240 million of which directly impacted the state of Virginia where the spaceport created more than 2,000 jobs.

The state of Virginia also currently ranks fifth in the nation for the number of projected STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) jobs because — surprise — STEM follows STEM. What better way to teach our future generations



about the importance of a STEM education than by providing them with local examples of potential careers?

Spaceport Camden will attract engineers, mathematicians and chemists to our region. These STEM jobs, across the board, produce high salaries, which in return benefit local communities and boost our tax base. Failing to see how even a moderately sized space industry on the Georgia coast could bring more prosperity to everything from local restaurants to home builders and retailers is the biggest mistake we can make here.

Between World War I and World War II, when commercial aviation was still in its infancy, it was widely obvious that the industry was unable to achieve its potential without a dedicated infrastructure. Back then, our very own Atlanta opened one of the first commercial airports in the nation and today it celebrates its title as

the world’s busiest airport year after year.

Now, nearly 100 years later, we are in a similar spot again. Stifling the development of this infrastructure could be detrimental to our region.

We could quite literally miss the (space) ship that could propel the Georgia coast to the forefront of innovation, aerospace technology and space exploration.

Jeffrey Tebo
St. Marys

Theft impacts project time, cost

I am saddened to report that there was a theft of all the windows at Habitat for Humanity’s job site located at 203 W. Mason Ave. in Kingsland.

This is truly a setback for the project financially and with our timeline. This is very disappointing since we are trying to help a family.

People just don’t realize what it takes to raise the money to do this kind of work. We don’t have the financial capital to withstand this type of problem.

Now that our project is going to take longer to complete, it will cost even more money. So not only are we out the money for the windows but the project as a whole will cost more.

If anyone has any information on who is responsible for this theft, please call the Kingsland police department at (912) 729-1442.

Doug Maurer,
executive director
Habitat for Humanity

Colville won’t seek re-election

I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to have served you on our city council the past three years

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OUR MISSION

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Our local and worldwide backyard

Another initiative for St. Marys will soon become a reality, generating more business traffic and spurring our commercial economy.

This real boost is coming to the midtown area of St. Marys as the Kings Bay Village owners have just won a highly competitive bid for the relocation of a veterans administration facility. Requiring 10,000 to 12,000 square feet for administrative and medical services, the VA anticipates moving into the west side of the Kings Bay Village early next year bringing increased customers into that shopping center complex.

When the city first learned of the open bidding process about 18 months ago, we encouraged the local business community with adequate space to pursue the opportunity. We commend the Kings Bay Village management for its persistence in following through in the long process to bring an important new tenant to midtown. Obviously, appropriate city staff will work closely with both the owner and the tenant to facilitate necessary permitting once the VA’s administrators, physicians and architects have completed their design requirements.

Clients visiting the new facility should spur an increase in business for the other tenants in the shopping center because we all know how important foot traffic is to retail and restaurant businesses.

Speaking of foot traffic, the nationwide popularity of Pokémon GO1 has hit locally and our streets are filled with gaming fans searching for “lures.” I



John Morrissey
Guest columnist

stopped a couple of young men in their 20s outside city hall last week and asked them to show me how the game is played. I’m not sure I understand all the strategic moves but I can see that it is getting more young people out on the streets and into our businesses, restaurants and visiting our city landmarks. I talked with a couple in a restaurant who were delighted that their children became so excited about Pokémon GO that they were eager to get off the sofa with their gaming devices and get outdoors for some exercise. It became a very desirable family activity.

Both our visitor bureau and Main Street staff responded quickly to the game’s popularity by working with the local business community to link game players with new lures to pull them into the downtown area. Last weekend and next week, they have special “pop-up lure” events to attract even more players to our streets and businesses. With so many youngsters and young adults flooding into our city, a caution is probably in order. They can get distracted with heads bent over phones capturing

characters and may not be as careful as we would like crossing streets. (For older residents not familiar with this game craze, it appears to be the latest version of a scavenger hunt, something familiar to an older generation.)

Two days after its release, Pokémon GO ranked above Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram as the most popular social media app on the Google Play store. Whether the popularity continues for a few weeks or a few months until something new in technology replaces it, this is just another example of the fast-changing world in which we live and how we need to be poised to take advantage of opportunities like this.

Last Saturday the city responded to a permit request from a Camden High School graduate now living in Savannah to allow Black Lives Matter to conduct a message event beginning at the waterfront park and walking about 3 miles through the city.

Police Chief Tim Hatch welcomed about 75 visitors and local residents to the event that stressed the need for respect and cooperation in light of recent violent incidents in other cities. Our thanks to our police chief and his force and the event organizer for ensuring a peaceful symbolic event with an important message, once again demonstrating the city’s welcoming nature and the professionalism of our public safety staff.

And just Monday night, the city council approved a long-awaited major improvement to the waterfront pavilion. We accepted a bid to better serve the boating

public with water, electrical and pump-out facilities on the floating dock at the intersection of Osborne and St. Marys streets. A self-serve “pay-at-the-pump” meter will allow 24/7 usage without requiring a staff response to operate the system. When our grant application is confirmed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources this project will be financed by SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) funds amounting to 25 percent and a Clean Vessel Act grant for the remaining 75 percent.

These examples highlight the complexity of city government. The veterans administration relocation and the improvements to the waterfront boating facilities were long processes that required perseverance and patience. The second examples of Pokémon, as an overnight sensation, and the Black Lives Matter last-minute request, demonstrate the need for a nimble but thoughtful response.

The challenge for local officials and employees is to be supportive and proactive because we never know what might spur the next economic boost, whether short term or long term. “Think globally and act locally” is something we have to consider in our personal lives, our business ventures and in managing an effective city government. For St. Marys leadership, it is always moving forward while protecting our small town values that mean so much to all of us.

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