

## It's all about life in **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** Camden County

The Tribune & Georgian has been publishing Camden County's news since the days when it was the only local form of mass communication.

The year after The Southeast Georgian was established, radio was invented. It took almost another 100 years after that before the Internet would transform news and information into what we have today.

One thing remains tried and true — this publication is devoted to serving Camden County. There are many places to learn about global and national news, but the Tribune & Georgian specializes in how those events hit home right here in our back yard.

A newspaper is a reflection of a community's identity and the values of those who read it. It is where we celebrate our collective successes, reflect on the shared crises we face and mark our community's course for the future. It is a living history book that we update every Thursday.

Our company, Community Newspapers Inc., believes that "strong newspapers build strong communities" and we understand the important role that we have to play in bridging together our citizens.

Your local newspaper offers factual and reliable news. The newspaper helps promote the exchange of ideas for the betterment of the community. We empower our readers with knowledge that helps them make better decisions.

But a newspaper is just as much in the hands of the community as those who work here every day at 206 Osborne Street, St. Marys. We depend on our readers to not only read their local newspaper, but to engage with us through letters to the editor and act upon what they read in our pages.

We also invite our readers to submit articles and photos that they want to share about the events that shape their lives — wedding announcements, academic awards, business promotions, fundraisers, social events, etc.

Most of us have shared so much of our lives on Facebook that it is not special anymore, but a newspaper article or photo can still be something that people will clip and save.

What's your news? How can we serve you better? Call us today at (912) 882-4927 or email our news desk at editor1@tds.net.

**Letters policy** — Letters to the editor must include the writer's full name, street address and telephone number for verification purposes. Writers are limited to 500 words and one letter per 20 days. Send letters to editor1@tds.net or drop off at 206 Osborne St. in St. Marys.

## Tribune & Georgian

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### OUR MISSION

The Tribune & Georgian is published with pride weekly for the people of Camden County by Community Newspapers Inc., Athens, Ga. We believe that strong newspapers build strong communities — "Newspapers get things done!" Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers. This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity, loyalty, quality and hard work.

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### Kiwanis put on a fantastic festival

Dear Editor,

For the third year, we have traveled from Florida to visit St. Marys during the week of the Fourth of July.

Last year, we happened upon your wonderful annual Kiwanis Independence Day Festival. It was an amazing day beginning with the fun run, the community parade, the festivities during the day and the highlight of the event: the fireworks show.

What a fantastic job the Kiwanis Club did in celebrating our country's birthday with the flavor and ambiance of the small town environment. St. Marys rolled back its sidewalks and personified an era of time that seems to be lost in our nation. The uniqueness of St. Marys should not be lost to over-development: big hotels, marinas, chain restaurants, etc.

This is what keeps us coming back to your quaint little town by the river. Our stay could not have been finer at the Riverview Hotel where we had a front row seat to the biggest fireworks show in South Georgia. We watched five different shows that etched the night sky with their brilliant colors and formations.

God bless the small town of St. Marys.

*Janice Ray and John Edwards*  
 Ocala, Fla.

### Director lacks support, respect

Dear Editor,

This letter is in full support of Rindy Howell as director of the St. Marys Senior Center.

With all the comments



and issues surrounding the St. Marys Senior Center, the hospital authority, task force and city hall, I would like to express my concerns of the lack of respect and lack of support Mrs. Howell is receiving from city hall. It would not take a rocket scientist to see that the Whites — Larry and Kathy — are trying their best to not only discredit Mrs. Howell's leadership but to destroy the years of service she has dedicated to this program as well.

Let me also add, I just returned from a center in North Georgia and the meal program there was nowhere near as wonderful as the meals provided to us at the city of St. Marys Senior Center. I understand Mrs. Howell was instrumental in working to make this happen. I have also attended several other senior centers and St. Marys Senior Center is the only one that does not require a payment. Donations only.

In response to Kathy White's letter to the editor regarding not taking another trip to the Alhambra,

I do not agree that the city should be responsible for the rowdy seniors' nightlife. Imagine the liability the city is taking, not to mention the responsibility Mrs. Howell would have. Also, to think the seniors can afford to pay money to go to the Alhambra, yet cannot donate for a meal program at the senior center speaks for itself.

*Barbara Smith*  
 St. Marys

### County faces big issues with project

Dear Editor,

It has been interesting to read the press releases and blog posts released by Camden County and its public relations and lobbying team since the end of the comment period for the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS).

It is clear that Camden County's strategy is to create the mistaken impression that the DEIS box has now been checked and the development of a commercial spaceport is right around the corner. The truth of the mat-

ter is that Camden County faces insurmountable problems with the DEIS that will very likely take years to be run to ground.

Citizens and organizations from around the country who value Cumberland Island National Seashore and the unique coastal environment surrounding the proposed site for the spaceport submitted well over 1,000 comments to the DEIS.

It is not just the volume of these comments that is noteworthy, as there are countless comments that are truly showstoppers for the proposed spaceport provided the FAA fully complies with the National Environmental Policy Act.

In fact, Camden County's own environmental subcommittee for the proposed spaceport submitted 36 pages of well-developed comments to the DEIS along with a separate letter to the FAA indicating that the DEIS does not contain essential information necessary for the subcommittee to complete its charge of

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## Master plan projects are underway

For the hour prior to St. Marys July town hall meeting, the council and staff provided a brief one-hour update on the implementation status of our master plan priorities for the current year. If you wonder how we can call an update that lasts a full hour "brief," it is because there are currently many projects underway and it is not possible to give each of them full attention in that brief span of time.

The update included everything from downtown dock repairs, to storm water mitigation, to enhanced resiliency planning, to citizen safety, to upgrading our senior center and our bicycle and walking paths, to staff retention, to economic development. Many citizens who attended the session were surprised at the number of issues the city was addressing simultaneously with an organized process.

While it is not possible to cover all the projects in this column, a few major ones can be highlighted. (To view a video of the full update, visit [www.stmarysga.gov](http://www.stmarysga.gov), click on agendas and videos at the top of the page and select the July 5 master plan update video.) Here are some of the highlights:

### Maximize docking opportunities

1. Completed a post Hurricane Irma fully functional ferry dock at the gateway dock in nine weeks at a cost of \$600,000 to ensure that ferry service to Cumberland Island would remain in St. Marys protecting our busi-



**John Morrissey**

Guest columnist

nesses and avoiding a transfer to Fernandina.

2. Completed boat ramp and courtesy dock engineering and redesign, awaiting DNR final approval with estimated completion December of this year.

3. The Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) will be submitted in August to assist in financing construction of 40 transient boat slips at the gateway dock. This will take 18 months for phase I to be completed.

### Address storm water mitigation

1. The St. Marys and Ready streets renovation is under construction using flapper gates to mitigate storm surge. Completion should be by the end of August.

2. Douglas Drive storm water project bids underway as all necessary easements have been acquired. This is the first phase of a major effort to ease flooding concerns in the central part of the city.

3. Advantages of storm water utility fund are being investigated to create a city-wide program for overall

storm water management.

### Coordinate and improve resiliency planning

1. Improved disaster recovery planning is underway in conjunction with Camden County officials who, by law, have the lead role. Updates on the efforts are coordinated through leadership at the emergency operations center.

2. Grants to purchase emergency generators have been obtained. The purchase of the two generators will provide resiliency for our utility support systems in any storm event.

3. Back up contracts for disaster debris pickup are being obtained like we have in the past. This pre-staging assisted in our ability to react quickly post Irma.

4. Purchase of a 700/800 MHz radio system was approved to ensure safety of citizens and emergency disaster workers. It will be in place within a year.

5. City IT services moved to the cloud so the city can continue operating from any location in case of evacuation.

### Aggressively pursue economic development

1. Continuing to work with the Joint Development Authority as it develops the marine center complex (Wharf at St. Marys) on the former mill site. A private developer is on board and committed to the project.

2. Actively market the midtown business site at the former airport location. Current serious interest from space industry is being pursued aggressively.

3. Downtown St. Marys Street redevelopment set to begin in the third quarter of the year. This will enhance drainage, update and improve waste systems and improve the overall appearance of St. Marys Street.

4. Adopt zoning ordinances designed to enhance economic development.

These are only a few of the master plan projects underway. There are dozens of others. We don't always get everything right, but we have a good track record of getting most of it right and correcting our game plan when we see a flaw or a problem.

Communication continues to be our major challenge. It is difficult to keep citizens apprised when we have so many projects underway. A new "Projects" tab on our city site will be operational shortly to offer updates on projects of interest to citizens.

Post Irma cleanup was critical to our downtown business survival and we prioritized getting that major clean-up accomplished. We are now finally at a point where insurance funds and FEMA funds, when released, will allow for completion of project plans.

As we continue to tackle the communications opportunities, I urge you to view this quarterly master plan update on video and to attend the next update one hour prior to the town hall meeting on Oct. 4.

John Morrissey is the mayor of St. Marys. He can be contacted at [john.morrissey@stmarysga.gov](mailto:john.morrissey@stmarysga.gov).