English

North Carolina school officials have found a way for students to get high grades in English — they just don't teach it until high school. Tenth graders today don't know the difference between a verb and a noun and may think a preposition is a proposition.

Hundreds of sophomores enter school think "UR" is the proper way to write "You are." That's because they are allowed to text instead of write. Some even think texting while driving is cool. It is especially cool when the car rolls over and tears off the roof. This is a real and tragic American problem caused by people who think the playing field is not level. That means if some people are too dumb or too lazy to read, they are allowed hold the bright kids back so that everybody gets at least a B.

Media Meditations
by R.L. Taylor

The difference between European school goals and American schools lack of goals is almost frightening — and the biggest reason there are so many parents looking for public schools that demand more. Private schools are simply beyond the reach of average families.

Our students don't even know our history. A statewide second-day-of-school quiz was truly frightening. The single question, "Through what state does the Mississippi River flow to reach the Gulf of Mexico?" baffled an entire class — except a single student — in one of North Carolina's best high schools. The lone student was not even an American but a 15-year old exchange student from Germany. (The answer will appear at the end of this column.)

Everybody has complained for years that American schools lag behind countries such as Germany, Japan and Great Britain. Unfortunately the socialists and liberals won that battle saying everyone must be equal no matter what. So now our children can be hammered into a solid mold of mediocrity of politically correct robots who think the county owes them money, food, an education and a free ride to the moon with a pocket full of free government credit cards. If one maxes out, they simply get another.

Elections will be easy and automatic with no quibbling or stupid questions about what that Misipi thing or whatever it is, is doing. They know they are entitled to all those because they are entitled. Didn't you hear the college students? They own City Hall and will do what they please there. Wall Street belongs to them and public parks are open latrines for their body waste, trash and garbage.

Pay attention to those politically correct graduates who don't know where the Mississippi flows. You see their work every afternoon on the 6 o'clock news.

R. L. Taylor is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He has been a newspaperman for more than 60 years.

(Answer: The State of Louisiana)

Sports and war

By John Heuer

Full disclosure: I played and coached basketball and soccer, played football, hockey, and baseball. Not very well, particularly, but I made up for my failings by watching my heroes perform magnificent feats in the ballpark and on TV. But sports have taken a hit, with the recent allegations that a child rapist was protected from criminal charges by a university where he was employed as an assistant football coach. Heads have rolled, as the legendary head football coach was sacked, along with the university president and other top officials. The effect on campus has been riotous. Students demonstrated against what they saw as the desecration of their icons. Many had chosen this school because of a veneer of honor and integrity, not just in the institution's propaganda, but also generations who held proudly to the masthead of their alma mater.

On Veterans Day, November 11, 2011, Staff Sergeant Calvin Gibbs was sentenced to life in prison, convicted of leading the so-called "Kill Team" on a mission of murder for sport in Afghanistan. Sgt. Gibbs likened his capture of victims' body parts for trophies to a hunter bringing home the antlers of a deer he had killed.

Leaving aside the awful weighing, the injustice and evil of these crimes, there is an important lesson here about command responsibility. Wikipedia informs us that the "Yamashita standard" of 'command responsibility' is based upon the precedent set by the United States Supreme Court in the case of Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita. He was prosecuted in 1945, in a still controversial trial, for atrocities committed by troops under his command in the Philippines. Yamashita was charged with "unlawfully disregarding and failing to discharge his duty as a commander to control the acts of members of his command by permitting them to commit war crimes."

According to this standard, Sgt. Gibbs' chain of command officers in the U.S. Army will face sanctions as well as the university leaders implicated in the football coach scandal.

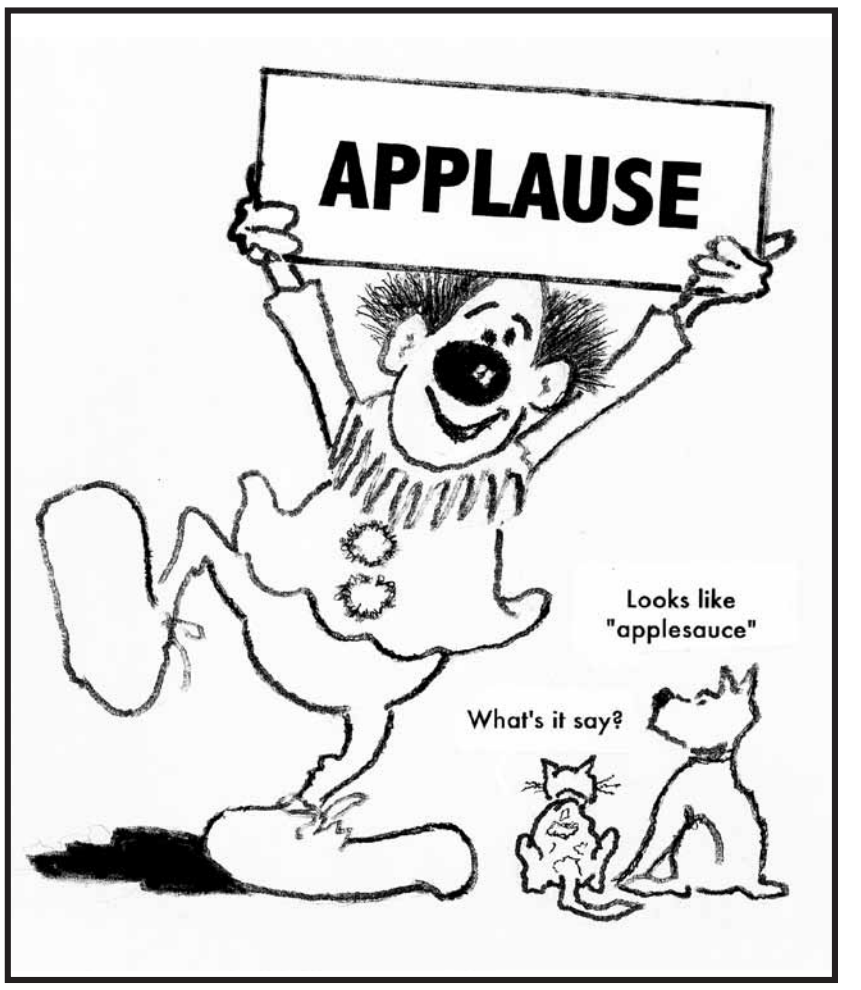
The point is that if you care more about your university's standing than whether or not we are sending Calvin Gibbs to foreign lands to harvest trophies, than you have already lost the game of command responsibility. For in a democracy, it is the citizens who have command responsibility. This is partly what the Occupy Movement is about.

My cousin recently visited from Madison, WI where they are launching a recall effort of their governor, Scott Walker. Starting November 15, Wisconsinites will have 60 days to gather 560,000 petition signatures to recall their governor. They have already recalled two state senators. They are organized and ready to play. Now that's good sport!

When our public servants no longer represent the public interest, when our military leaders are no longer responsible for their commands, then it's time to offer them the chance to seek other work, or in some cases, issue warrants for their arrest. Our constitution guarantees our right to free speech, peaceable assembly, and to redress of grievances.

The exercise of citizenship is not a spectator sport, but it can be the most meaningful game you will ever play.

John Heuer is chair NC Peace Action.



10 years and counting

By Julian Sereno

It's more than 10 years since I became editor of this newspaper, and nine years since I've owned it. It's been a great adventure, a wild ride I've made by the seat of my pants. It's also been a blast – the past 10 years have been among my happiest.

I was hired to be editor of Chatham Crossroads in 2001. First published in January 1999, it won non-profit 501(3) c status and with that the right to spend a Z. Smith Reynolds grant it had won earlier, which they used to pay me and the printer.

I kept my day job as a self-employed public relations consultant whose business had slowed with the dot-com bust. Before that, I worked 12 years with the title Neighborhood Editor for the Durham Sun (hurray!) and then the Herald-Sun (boo!). Working for a newspaper is like the girl with the curl, right in the middle of her forehead. When it is good it is very, very good and when it is bad it is horrid.

Editing Chatham Crossroads was fun, like editing the Family Scene in the Durham Sun. But this was crazier. I was furnished with a list of email addresses of contributors and told to let them know what articles I wanted and when. "Nobody is going to respond to this in a million years," thought I to myself. My first paycheck bounced.

But a miracle happened. They did respond, and sure enough, my first issue, September 2001, focused on education and had plenty of articles. The writers were talented and contributed faithfully even though I only actually met a few of them. I did meet Hart Palmer, the designer, Dr. John Shillito, the photographer, and Debbie Meyer, the former editor, and all graced the paper and bailed me out of many jams.

Chatham Crossroads was supposed to be a monthly, but we came out five times that year, the same number as in its two previous years. The grant ran out and no new money came in. The board was voting itself out of existence, when I asked if I could take it over and try to run it as a for-profit. They gave me their blessing if I changed the name.

Kelly Lojk, then the designer, came up with the name Chatham County Line and donated the logo and the layout for the first issue, Fall 2002/Winter 2003. Jackie Helvey of UniqueOrn Enterprises designed and started managing the website, www.chathamcountyline.org. The hard part was selling ads.

The miracles continued, five times a year. Until 2006, when we really became a monthly — 10 issues a year, with a combined issue for July and August and for December and January. Those were boom times for newspapers. My alma mater, The Durham Herald-Sun, which had dwindling circulation and supposedly lost millions a year, was bought by Paxton Media of Paducah, KY, for more than $100 million. McClatchy, a California newspaper company who bought the Raleigh News & Observer, also bought Knight-Ridder and its many high-profile metropolitan dailies for $2 billion.

Chatham was also booming. I was going to grow Chatham County Line's market share and build it into a high profile regional monthly, and then sell it to McClatchy for $1 million plus and retire in the lap of luxury. But things didn't quite work out that way.

Newspapers fell harder and faster than anyone after Lehman Brothers failed and the housing bubble burst. Classified ads jumped to Craig's List; real estate and auto ads evaporated. Metropolitan dailies, including the Herald-Sun and the N&O, axed staff by the hundreds, and the papers themselves shrunk and shriveled. Many filed for bankruptcy. Warren Buffett advised not buy newspapers under any circumstances.

Chatham County Line changed course. Surviving and becoming sustainable for the long haul became the new goal.

The miracles have continued. Every month ads and articles flow in and we continue to publish. We do our best for our advertisers, who pay the freight for the whole shebang. Our online edition at www.chathamcountyline.org is a PDF file, not chic but you can't read the paper without seeing the ads. Anyone who buys an ad is guaranteed news space. That is the heart of a community newspaper — anybody can publicize any cause or enterprise in the news pages if they buy ads to pay for the space.

This issue represents the 85th miracle since I started 10 years ago. Hart Palmer did the design and most of the ads, Debbie Meyer wrote an article, and while there are no photos from Dr. John this time, he did do a photo essay for the October issue.

As I wrote before, I'm having a blast and as long as the community supports Chatham County Line with articles and advertising, let's aim for 185 miracles. Or more.

Unless somebody wants to cough up $1 million. Warren Buffet did just buy the Omaha newspaper.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.