

# We MUST try

This is a time of decision for Letcher County and for Whitesburg in particular.

We must make up our minds--not next month or next year, but now--whether we want to make an effort to become a part of the rest of the world or whether we prefer to rot in our own smugness. Whether we prefer to grow into a community of some 4,000 to 5,000 residents, or whether we prefer to remain for the next 50 years as we have for the past 50 in a tiny town of 1,500, unable to offer the services and advantages that larger communities afford their citizens.

The front page of this week's Mountain Eagle carries in considerable detail President Johnson's message to Congress asking for new authority to provide development funds for areas which are not now in the mainstream of national life. We certainly qualify as one of those areas. There seems little doubt that the Congress will give the President the authority he seeks.

And there also seems little doubt, if you will read what the President has to say, that from there on it will be largely up to us. He is handing us the blocks with which to build--it's up to us to stack them into a structure which will hold together.

As we have said many times, there is much to be desired as far as Letcher County is concerned in the Appalachian bill and the poverty programs recently passed by Congress. Much of what was left out of those measures is included in the President's new request to Congress. The Appalachian bill provides some but not all of the "social overhead" we need to attract quality citizens and businesses; the new area development legislation can help to provide the rest. The poverty program trains people for new occupations; the area development bill helps to attract industries to hire the people the poverty program trains. In addition, the House of Representatives has passed an administration school bill which hopefully will help in the upgrading of local school systems; the bill seems sure to get through the Senate and become law. There still are noticeable gaps in housing, flood control and natural resources development, but these may come later.

But no matter how much money Congress appropriates, we will be no better off in Letcher County and Whitesburg if we do not get to work to make the best possible use of it. As we see it, this means several things:

First, Whitesburg's city council must shed its timidity and move boldly to annex enough territory in all directions to make the town show in census reports as the center it is. We all know here that Ermine and Mayking and Marlowe and Cowan and Craft's Colly and Sandlick and Solomon and Whitco, etc., are essentially a part of the town, but they don't show up in any of the statistics which form the basis for decisions made in Washington, D. C. Much of the money to be allocated under the new programs will go to so-called "growth centers" or "economic development centers" which show potential as business and trading centers for larger areas. Whitesburg doesn't look very good to the guy in Washington who has never been here and who sees only that no one has moved into town in goodness knows when. The money will be available under the new federal programs to clear substandard areas, to buy up open spaces for parks and recreational use, to install water and sewage systems in any territory which might be taken into the city, to build new streets which would open up new territory for economic development. Because we are in a "distressed" area, we qualify for higher loans and grants than other parts of the country. The opportunity is here now to make the growth; it will not return again soon.

Because Whitesburg has not shown evidence of growth in two decades, it is not now even being considered as the possible location for any of the new regional centers in several fields which will come to Eastern Kentucky as a result of the new federal programs. Hazard, on the other hand, is, because of its mere size, likely to come away with several multi-million dollar projects. There is no question that the major portions of the Appalachian Development money and any money which may become available under the new area development act will go to "growth centers." The rules are in the law, for anybody to see who cares enough to look. We must move now to show that we are interested in growing, before the final decisions are made in Washington.

Second, Whitesburg needs to hire its own professional city planner, the very best one it can find. We need to try to get federal planning money to help us, but if that isn't available yet, we need to try to squeeze it from city funds or to solicit it from interested citizens until federal money can be obtained. We need to look hard to be sure we are finding the best planner available. Surely with all the publicity and interest in Eastern Kentucky and Appalachia someone of real ability would be interested in meeting the challenges here. When we say "planner," we do not mean somebody's uncle or brother or cousin or father-in-law who sees a chance for a job. We mean a trained professional planner, one who is a graduate of a reputable university school of planning and who has had some experience in the field. He should know the techniques of applying for grants, etc., and should be familiar before he comes here with the programs which are available. He should be willing to move here and put his children into our schools and live among us so that he can be thoroughly acquainted with our problems and our possibilities. Technically, the city already has a planning contract with the state of Kentucky but actually there has been no state planner here for many months, and there appears to be little hope one will come any time soon. At any rate, the state people stay for only a few hours at a time and what we need is an on-site planner interested in us alone. Such a man will not be cheap, but he will be worth his cost in benefits to the entire community.

Third, the Whitesburg Planning Commission needs to resume its monthly meetings, with or without a professional planner. The commission has pretty well ceased to meet unless something comes up it has to approve for the housing or urban renewal programs already under way. The function of a planning commission is to plan--for the future, not the past. If the members of the commission are not interested enough in their community to meet once a month and study new programs and try to figure out how we can use them, the city council needs to get a new commission. And if the city isn't interested enough to consider annexation, employment of a city planner, etc., then we need to get a new city council.

These are not things that can wait until after the election or after summer vacation. They are things that must be done now, things that should have been done many months ago.

The President put it very plainly:

"No programs or projects will be initiated at the federal level. The initiative, the ideas and the request for assistance must all come to Washington, not from Washington."

As we see it, what he means is that it is up to us. Here are the bootstraps, but we have to do the pulling.

Either we do, or we may as well all start packing to move to Hazard, and who in Letcher County wants to do a thing like that?

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Right-to-work

To the editor:

I wanted to write you a letter and tell you just what we in Letcher County who call ourselves union men are doing.

We are going to Virginia and the Pound to buy a lot of our needs just because we are straining at the 3 per cent sales tax, and at the same time we are leaving our countrymen and patronizing a right-to-work law over in Virginia like we the union people don't like.

As far as I am concerned I will spend what little money I get on the Kentucky side of the mountain, where it belongs. Because we have just as good merchandise as anybody, and we don't like any little Taft-Hartley law like the state of Virginia has.

So far as I am concerned I am going to trade with friends, like the merchants in Whitesburg, Neon and Jenkins for what I want and support our friend, the editor of the Mountain Eagle. All together "now swing," let's come home and be men, not mice.

JOHN LUCAS  
Cromona, Ky.

## Jackie

To the editor:

I'll never forget the first day I saw Jackie. It was a cold day in November. We were taking care of the Mountain Haven Children's Home. We knew he was coming to live with us, so we had the house nice and warm. When we finally heard a car in the driveway, I looked out the window and there he was, with his five sisters and the welfare agent. He was only five. He didn't have a coat on. He was almost running up the walk.

I opened the door and told them to hurry. It was so cold. Jackie was car sick. He had a large burn on his hip where he had backed into the stove trying to get warm. He was mad at the world and especially at Herbert Stamper for taking him to Dr. Collins before bringing him to us and at Dr. Collins for hurting him while dressing his hip. He was crying. He lay back in the big chair, careful not to hurt his little sore hip. I hurried to the kitchen and brought cookies and milk for him. Jackie would not speak a word. We all tried to get him in a better mood, but he wouldn't speak until Mr. Stamper left, and as soon as he walked out the door, Jackie said, "That old doctor shot me right in the rear." We had to laugh--then he laughed too, and from then on he talked continuously.

He stayed with us two years or more, and there are lots of memories. He was always hungry. He hardly ever came through the dining room door without saying, "Bonnie, I hungry." It gives me consolation to know that I always had something to put in his little hand. If it was a glass of milk and some bread, cookies, or just a piece of bread he was happy and never failed to say "thank you, Bonnie." When the boys would start to their room at night he would say, "Bonnie, can us boys have something to chew on before we go to sleep?"

Oh! the many ways I may have failed in the work I tried to do at the home. I may not have had enough patience with them; the work was so hard and we were all so tired so much. But thank God for knowing that I cooked for them and tried to keep them warm and clean. And so the years passed, and Jackie grew and got fat and went to school and made good grades. If he came in with a knot on his head, he wouldn't tell where he got it. When the big boys carried coal, Jackie carried coal too. You couldn't stop him; he wanted to. If we got up at daylight to hoe corn, Jackie was up with us, with his hoe. We couldn't slip away from him; he wanted to be up and out. He didn't want to miss anything.

Last Sunday we went to his funeral. There he lay in his little white casket. He was so dressed up in his little blue suit and white shirt. His face was like a cherub. His hands were white as snow. I looked at him and my heart hurt. His little twin sister came and stood by me and looked at him and said, "He looks like a little preacher lying there." Then she cried and cried.

Jackie won't ever be hungry or sick or cold again. He was taken good care of the last years of his life and he was happy. He won't ever say again, "I hungry." But there will be other Jackies, and you have only to try to take care of a children's home to know the sadness and sorrows of all the Jackies. And you look at them and think, "There but for the grace of God could be my child." Let's not forget Mountain Haven Children's Home, and let's be sure every time a little Jackie comes to the kitchen down there and says "I hungry" there will always be something a little boy likes to eat.

His shoes and playthings we shall keep,  
They will help to ease our sorrows  
When at them we shall look and weep  
As we travel life's tomorrows.

MRS. BONNIE DEMPSEY  
Fleming, Kentucky

(Editor's Note: The "Jackie" in the above letter is Jackie Dishman Sexton, who died earlier this month at the age of 10).

## Our government

To the editor:

To whom it may concern--our fellow Americans of Letcher County, of the Democrat Party, of the future of every family:

If we don't do this, who is going to do this for us? This is the job for our fellow Americans of the county government--to hold what we have got and honor our county government. The appreciation that our state government has given us, the high honor our United States government has given us, has got us concerned.

We must plan for the future of what is happening to us fellow Americans of Letcher County. We have got our families concerned of the medical financing. We are concerned of the business financing of Letcher County. We are all concerned of the medical bill that has been passed by our county government, state government and our United States government. This bill helps provide for our medical tools and drugs of our county government. This concerns our health and welfare of our fellow Americans to support the business financing of the public of Letcher County. We are highly honored of the leadership that our county government has given us. They have given us a program to support our families of Letcher County. We are giving you a brief note on the food stamp program of Letcher County. The reason the people are leaving Letcher County to buy the stuff they need is because Letcher County don't get enough business to stock groceries back in their stores. This food stamp program has been set up to provide for the business of Letcher County, such as food, clothing and industries for the public of Letcher County. What party gives us the social security? What party gives us the public assistance? What party took the mortgage off our homes for the public assistance? What party has got us fellow Americans of Letcher County concerned of the leadership of the Letcher area? The Democrat party has got us all concerned of the future of Letcher County. Let not our fellow Americans try to block that future. The proposition is from 25 to 35 of our fellow Americans to plan for the future, in which the fellow Americans can block that future. We aren't going to let them. Let's highly honor our county government of the support they have given us, of the indus-

tries of Letcher County, of the program of work, clothing and food. We are concerned of our health and education of Letcher County. Our county government is giving us this kind of support. We should thank and honor them for this kind of support, of the leadership they have given us.

Tell the people to support our county government such as they have supported us. Do unto others as ye would have others do unto you. United we stand, divided we fall.

CHONOS MEADE  
Deane, Kentucky

## Job corps

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following letter from a recent Letcher County in the federal Job Corps program was received by Mrs. Paul Vermillion, who is in charge of the local Job Corps office.)

Dear Mrs. Vermillion:  
I know you told me to let you hear from me as soon as I got here, but I just haven't had time.

Well, to start telling you about the camp, first I want to let you know that I love the place.

We have a dormitory with a lounge with all kinds of room, and a rec hall with all kinds of different sports. It is an old camp, but they have repaired it and it is just great.

I have met so many people and made so many friends since I have been here, and the teachers and my counselor are just wonderful.

Well, I know I haven't described it very well for you, but all I can think of to say about it is it is just great.

EDSYL GIBSON  
Kilmer Job Corps Center  
Edison, New Jersey

## Spring late but hope whispers

By LARRY CAUDILL

This is written on March 21, the first day of spring, the Farmer's Almanac says.

But when we awoke this morning and looked out the third floor window of the Whitesburg Appalachian Hospital, there was a two-inch blanket of snow on the ground and snow was falling briskly.

Just 24 hours earlier the sky was high and pure blue and the sun was bright. Children, too young to visit in the hospital, romped on the greensward out front. The grass had a definitely greener tinge. A nurse came across the mall from the housing quarters in short-sleeved uniform, a light sweater over her shoulders. Even the time-battered half-dozen old men in this ward muted their complaints of aches and pains and told the doctors, "I believe I'm a little bit better."

They stared out the window remembering such bright days from the long-dim past.

It was a spring day. The sun lingered a little longer in the western sky at the end of day, encouraging the birth of spring. But the gods of the winds changed their course in their stratospheric meandering, delivering masses of cold air and producing the incidental effect of snow.

Now the trees stand frostily lacy against the covering of snow on the mountainside. The first traffic leaves twin dark paths in the street.

The same old men again stare out the window at the swirling snow, but without any sense of discouragement or depression, rather with a sense of satisfaction.

It is as if an old and constant friend had returned to visit for a spell after you had thought him departed for a lengthy absence.

And there is the comforting thought that tomorrow spring will be back--and the mental if not physical spirit will respond to the eternal lift of spring.

The sun and the bright blue sky will be welcome again.  
Hope springs eternal, in spring.