

# OPINION

## GUEST COLUMN

### Principal offers graduates different advice for success

How many high school and college graduations have you attended over the years? I can't answer that, because I don't have that many fingers and toes. Let's just say it's a bunch. And what is the most popular theme of graduation speeches? That's right: "You should follow your dream." "Never give up." "A setback is a setup for a comeback."

That kind of encouragement is important, of course. Graduates need that. They need to believe in themselves.

But W. Alton White came up with something different for his brief talk May 25 to graduating seniors of LaGrange High School in west Georgia. (Our grandson, Alex Brock, is one of the happy graduates.)

As principal of the school, White needed to say a few words, and he chose exactly the right ones, I think. What did he say?

"Always stay humble and kind."

If those words sound familiar, it's probably because they're from a country song by Tim McGraw. It begins this way: "You know there's a light that

glows by the front door/Don't forget the key's under the mat/When childhood stars shine/Always stay humble and kind."

I talked to the principal and congratulated him on a great talk. But did you use this theme, I asked, because you think students are not humble and kind? Here's what he said:

"To be honest with you, I think the adults they come in contact with don't set a really good example for them at times. The thing that

sticks out in my mind is all this stuff going on politically. No matter if you're a Democrat or Republican, in favor of the president or against the president or whatever, you turn on the news every day, and they're just ugly to each other – the name-calling and just downright hateful almost."

He went on: "I think, for the most part, kids are kind, and somewhere along the way, we steer them in the wrong direction. One thing that I wanted to get across to them is when you become an adult, don't let that change who you are now."

White noted that the song does not say young people should become humble and kind. It says they should stay humble and kind.

To help graduates remember his message, he sent them home with a 48-page hardback book, along with their diplomas, titled "Humble and Kind." It features lyrics of the song, along with an introduction by Tim McGraw and an epilogue by Lori McKenna, the songwriter. When White's administrative assistant, Janice Westbrook, called the publisher, Hachette Book Group, and explained what the books would be used for, the company sent 270 copies, free of charge.

White ended his talk with this advice from the song: "Don't take for granted the love this life gives you/When you get where you're goin'/Don't forget to turn back around/Help the next one in line/Always stay humble and kind."

That may be the best advice I've ever heard at a graduation ceremony. Thanks, Mr. White.

**Phil Hudgins is former senior editor for Community Newspapers Inc., parent company of the Mitchell News-Journal.**



Phil HUDGINS



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Thanks for promoting greater public involvement

**To the editor:**  
There is a lot of truth in your editorial, "The Truth About Misinformation." You are correct in saying the Mitchell County Board of Commissioners is considering removing Mitchell County from the Toe River Health District.

As leaders of SEARCH, we have met both with the County Commissioners and TRHD staff to learn more about the issues involved. We encourage open and frank dialogue about this matter. While it is not our role to take sides, it is our mission to ensure the citizens of Mitchell County get the essential health services they require.

We have heard your advice to attend the monthly open meeting of the Mitchell County Board of Commissioners (we were told the first meeting of the month is the only one at which the public can make comments). At our regular June SEARCH meeting, we identified volunteers from both counties to attend those meetings. That is one way we can all be prepared for decisions relating to local healthcare.

In addition to the health department, we are watching how ambulance service in both counties will be handled when the current contract expires. HCA's commitment is to fund it until June of 2020, but what happens then? SEARCH has established a new committee to look into that, and we invite anyone with concern, interest or knowledge to become a part of it (searchwnc.org).

Again, thank you for your vigilance in reporting on open meetings and for promoting greater public involvement in the decisions that affect the health of area citizens.

**Susan Larson  
Risa Larsen  
Karin Rolett  
SEARCH**

made this idea a reality.  
**Rodger and Nancy Hinshaw**  
Spruce Pine

### Plane annoying people who live below

**To the editor:**  
Someone in a small plane has been flying over the area for about the past three days.

I have no problem with recreational flying, but the issue is the plane is flying in circles in the same area over and over. Perhaps the pilot does not realize how annoying this is to those of us down below.

The sky is enormous, and I can't understand why the flight can't proceed to Asheville or some other destination and back instead of this annoying circle.

**Tom Ferguson**  
Spruce Pine

### SPACE festival a success

**To the editor:**  
With plenty of forethought and set determination wanting to put his hometown of Spruce Pine back on the map along with Mitchell County, Jimmy Hinshaw and his wife, Jacqui, came up with the idea of a convention.

They decided to call this convention the Spruce Pine Alien Convention and Expo, or SPACE. The convention was approved, and things worked as perfectly as had been planned. There was fun for nearly all downtown businesses as they decorated their storefronts with painted aliens, and there were plenty of vendors along the streets with space- and alien-related items for sale. There was fun for all ages.

Mike Bara from the History Channel show "Ancient Aliens" and noted author was the guest speaker, and the Bare Dark Sky Observatory tours went well thanks to the clear skies. The SPACE event drew approximately 8,000 people from 22 states to Mitchell County and brought life back to this area. SPACE was an out-of-the-park grand slam home run for Spruce Pine and all of Mitchell County.

Thank you to all involved who

### Family thanks supporters

**To the editor:**  
The family of Jack Dellinger would like to thank everyone for the beautiful flowers, cards, food and money that was sent to the Mt. Calvary FWB Church building fund.

Thank you Grassy Creek Baptist Church, Western Carolina Church and Mt. Calvary FWB.

Thank you to the Rev. Jim Shoupe and the Rev. Nathan Silver for the great job during the funeral.

Thank you Hospice and Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge for your care and support during Jack's illness.

**The family of Jack Dellinger**

## ASK DENISE

# How to deal with difficult people

**Editor's note: Writer's answers do not reflect those of the Mitchell News-Journal and are not meant to replace medical or mental health care.**

**DEAR DENISE:** It seems difficult people surround me. I have several co-workers who are highly competitive and back-stabbing. I have extended family who is continually seeking drama. I do my best to deal with them since I have to, but they are wearing me down.



Denise HARRISON

Any advice?  
**DEAR READER:** As long as we deal with people, there will always be some difficult ones. The key is remembering we can wear ourselves out trying to change them, while the truth is the only thing we have the power to change

is our reaction. The Chopra Center, a wellness retreat that also specializes in online advice, addresses this in one of its posts about seven steps for dealing with negative people:

1. Use the S.T.O.P. model to avoid reactivity  
This acronym can be the most fundamental step in coping with a complicated personal relationship. S.T.O.P. stands for:  
• Stop whatever you're doing;  
• Take three deep breaths;  
• Observe how your body feels; and  
• Proceed with kindness and compassion  
No matter how challenging the problematic person or relationship is, this pause will help to derail the emotional reactions that are primed to take over in the heat of the moment.
2. See through the control drama the other person is using  
Control dramas are manipulative behaviors people often fall into when their needs aren't being met.  
There are four primary control dramas:  
• Being nice and manipulative;

- Being nasty and manipulative;
  - Being aloof and withdrawn; and
  - Playing the victim or "poor me" role
3. Don't take it personally  
When you're involved with a difficult person, it can feel like their words are a deliberate personal attack. This is not the case. Their reaction and behavior is not about you; it's about them
  4. Practice defenselessness  
This can be a powerful strategy when confronted with a difficult person. Being defenseless doesn't mean you're passive – you still maintain your personal opinion and perspective in the situation – but rather than engaging to make the other person wrong, you consciously choose not to be an adversary.
  5. Walk away if necessary  
Difficult people can often draw you into a field of negativity. If you feel like you can't maintain your awareness and objectivity, there's nothing wrong with removing yourself from the situation.

6. See the experience as an evolutionary opportunity  
As challenging as it is, dealing with a difficult person can be a learning experience. Relationships mirror your inner world back and help open your eyes to those things you may not want to see. The qualities in another that upset you are often those aspects of yourself you repress.
  7. Resonate compassion  
Compassion is an attribute of the strong, highly evolved soul who sees opportunities for healing, peace and love in every situation.  
Difficult people can challenge your commitment to spirit, but by practicing these steps, you can respond reflectively, rather than reactively and take your relationships to a more conscious level of expression.
- Denise Harrison is a Licensed Counselor. Send questions to questionsandlettersmn@gmail.com or call and leave a message at 828-467-0037. Submissions are anonymous.**

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