Look Out! Here Comes 2025!

In just a few days, we say “goodbye” to 2024. We saw a bit of everything in 2024, both good and bad. We had an early spring, and a wet planting/early haying season. Then it turned hot and dry. The drought was broken by record rainfall followed by devastating winds and flooding, all courtesy of Hurricane Helene. Then it got hot and dry again! Still, it is important to be thankful for all the blessings we have.

As 2024 ends and 2025 approaches, I want to take the opportunity to say thank you to each of you as you read this column. Thanks to Smyth County News for giving me the opportunity to share with you. Thanks to many of you how have taken the time to share how you feel about my columns. But even more importantly, I give thanks for being from our little spot on the planet. For all our challenges, we have a lot to be proud of here in Smyth County.

Too often, we give in to negativity. It is easy because so much of the fuel for negative thinking is absolutely true. Being upbeat in the face of the challenges we face takes courage and strength of heart, and while we all get tired from time to time, it is important to think of all of our many blessings that we enjoy each day. One blessing we share is that we all know a great many people who call this area home. Because we do know so many folks, it is important to select our words wisely and to speak as kindly as possible. As a younger, yet wise colleague of mine once said, “even in the leanest of times, it doesn’t cost a dime to be kind.”

Years ago, during a visit to Georgia for their State Ag Agent meeting, I had the privilege of hearing Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture, Mr. Gary Black deliver the keynote address at their banquet. Commissioner Black delighted the audience with stories and he shared a great message about the power of words in our daily lives. He stated that he demanded that his employees NEVER use the phrase, “I’m sorry” when speaking to clients. Instead, he directs them to say, “Please forgive me.” The difference is that saying “I’m sorry” ends the conversation without any acknowledgement of the offense nor does it require any action as a result. Asking for forgiveness empowers the person who is injured. They have an acknowledgement of your empathy and allows them to act on their feelings in a positive way…. a way that moves both of you forward.

As I traveled across the South as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of County Agriculture Agents, I was tasked with asking agents and specialists to join our State and National organizations. Instead of asking people to join, I began asking members to become an active part of NACAA and their State Associations. Same thing? Not really.

If we asked others to join and they did, they had fulfilled their commitment and thus led them to ask “ok, now what?” By asking others to become an active part of our organizations, their membership is only the first step in their personal journey as an engaged member.

In Georgia, I shared with the members one of my favorite analogies regarding explaining the Extension office and what we do. What is something that most everyone has in their home that uses has shares the word “extension” in its name? “An extension cord” comes to mind quickly. The Extension office is not unlike an extension cord. We “extend” the power of research-based information from our Land Grant Universities out into the communities we serve. We empower our clients with the “power’ of the University as if they were within reach of the campus itself.

As we evaluate our own lives and our involvement in our Churches, schools, and civic organizations, are we just members or are we plugged in and full of energy to serve and advance the cause? We all want a better Smyth County and a better Southwest Virginia. Our challenges sometimes seem great and our resources few. That said, we are either part of the solution or part of the problem. Standing around waiting is not an option. I am glad to be from our part of the world and I invite you to join me in this thought…. “We aren’t perfect, but this is the perfect place for me!”

Best wishes for a successful and joyful 2025!

Upcoming Events

Jan 7, 2025 VQA Sale

Jan 13 VQA Steer Take Up

Jan 15 VQA Heifer Take Up

Jan 18 VT Beef Health Conference, Campus

Jan 28 VFGC Winter Conference, Wytheville

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodation to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at 276-706-8339 /TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.