

DANA BEYERLE



ALABAMA EXPOSURE

Byrne wants to put breaks on flex-time

Two-year college system Chancellor Bradley Byrne said he won't approve flex-time for outside jobs by two-year system employees, including legislators, if a policy passed by the state school board is approved and survives a court challenge.

Byrne proposed new flexible schedule and unpaid leave policies for two-year college employees, including the dozen or so legislators who work for the system but who take time off from their jobs to attend legislative sessions.

"I will take all individual requests for unpaid leaves as they come to me," Byrne said. "There is no guarantee that any president will do that for any legislator, but if they do so they must certify that the leave will not 'hamper' the operations of the college. What kind of position would it be OK for the employee to be gone for three days a week three and a half months out of the year and it not hamper the operations of the institution?"

Sessions uses Web site to recruit supporters

Republican U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama is beginning his 2008 re-election campaign. In an e-mail from the Alabama Republican Party, Sessions said he has been honored to serve the state for the past 10 years.

Sessions, the state's junior senator, is trying to recruit 1,000 campaign supporters who are willing to register at www.jeffsessions.com to get e-mail updates. "As we go forward, I know we can continue to achieve great things for the state and the country if we work together," Sessions said.

Association taps state business council officer

Quentin Riggins, the Business Council of Alabama's senior vice president for governmental affairs, was recently named to the National Public Affairs Steering Committee of the National Association of Manufacturers, according to the business council. Riggins is one of 16 members of National Association of Manufacturers' steering committee from the Southeast, the Business Council of Alabama said.

The National Public Affairs Steering Committee has 140 members nationwide.

"As Alabama's exclusive representative to National Association of Manufacturers' National Industrial Council, BCA is able to ensure that Alabama manufacturers are well represented when important public

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AT LARGE

Sudduth's emotion made his art special



STAFF PHOTO | TOMMY STEVENSON

Fayette folk artist Jimmy Lee Sudduth painted a clown's face on a ceiling tile. He died Sept. 2 at age 97.

I first met Jimmy Lee Sudduth, the folk art master from Fayette who died Sept. 2 at the age of 97, sometime in the late 1960s.

When I was a sophomore at Birmingham-Southern College, I made the acquaintance of Jimmy Griffin, who is also from Fayette and has been a life-long friend.

Seems Jimmy grew up, if not exactly across the street from Sudduth, at least in the same neighborhood, and they had become fast friends. Even as a teenager, Jimmy "got" Sudduth's art long before most people did.

When Jimmy showed up at BSC, he decorated the walls of his dorm room with Sudduth's characteristic and astounding mud paintings, the most spectacular of which the artist had done on a flattened-out cardboard box, on which he painted a huge 18-wheeler coming right at you.

Few people knew what to think of this art — strange, primitive and sophisticated at the same time. This was, of course, before the "folk," or "primitive" or "outsider" or whatever you want to call it art boom began.

One time, Jimmy took me and some other college mates home with him to meet Sudduth, who lived in what can only be described as a shack by the railroad tracks, which were down in a deep gorge behind his house.

Sudduth had painted another one of his monumental works (I forget the subject) and nailed it to the red clay on one side of the gorge.

"To give the engineers something to look at when they come through," he said.

Sudduth had scores, perhaps hundreds of paintings, on surfaces ranging from acoustic tile, to rough boards, to cardboard, even to an old metal washing machine lid, piled up in an outbuilding was barely roofed, much less weather proof.

TOMMY STEVENSON



We bought a couple of paintings (one of a sad clown you can see here), for around \$30 each.

After I got in the newspaper business and landed at The Tuscaloosa News, one of the first stories I collaborated on was about Sudduth, whom a couple of us visited in Fayette. I bought a painting of a log cabin, a subject he was then specializing in, that now hangs proudly in the living room of my own log cabin.

I think Sudduth's old house had burned down by that time and he had moved in to one only slightly better (the folk-art mania was still a few years away), but he still had his stacked up "collection" in that rickety shed.

After the folk-art boom did hit, Sudduth began exhibiting at Kentuck and other arts festivals. In no time, he became known as one of the foremost genre artists of his time.

I remember a story in The Birmingham News from about 20 years or so ago after Kentuck had become known as the premier folk-arts festival in the country and was attracting dealers and collectors from as far away as New York, Los Angeles and even London.

The story said when Jimmy Lee drove up around dawn on Saturday in his beat-up old pickup, his paintings piled high in the bed, not a single one touched the ground without being sold first.

At one festival, I went over to his

booth to renew our acquaintance (and marvel at the prices his work was then commanding) and he was typically self-effacing.

"I sell everything I bring down here by noon," he said with a twinkle in his eye and after one of his impromptu harmonica riffs. "They don't know that it doesn't take me but 30 minutes to do them. It takes me about as long to paint one as to sell it."

This at a time when Sudduths were hanging in some of the most prestigious folk art museums in the world and when he was considered a true master of the form.

I don't claim to be an art expert, much less a critic, but the thing that always seemed to set Sudduth's work apart from most of his peers was his uncanny ability to capture both emotion (just look at the clown's face!) and movement with the slightest of brush — or more often, hand and finger — stroke.

You should have seen the 18-wheeler my friend had in his dorm room. It was from a three-quarters perspective and looked like it was about to leave the wall and run you over.

A postscript: When they opened the House of Blues in New Orleans several years ago, the first thing I thought when I entered to find every wall plastered with what I assumed was ersatz folk art because there was so much of it, it took Jimmy Lee's signature on a piece hanging over a urinal, for me to realize that it was all real.

To this day there is a huge Sudduth painting of a cow hanging in a place of honor at the House of Blues on the wall parallel with the stage and by the green room door on the second floor.

Reach Tommy Stevenson at tommy.stevenson@tuscaloosaneews.com or 205-722-0194.

MY TURN | HAYSE BOYD

Northport should apologize to Harper

Appreciation for, and understanding of, the tireless efforts of those who preceded us is the least we can do for our ancestors. Unless a working knowledge of history is preserved, succeeding generations stumble in darkness.

On Sept. 11, the lead article on the front page of The Tuscaloosa News saddened my heart, along with the hearts of all residents of our community who hold the belief that the preservation of historical landmarks, documents, artifacts, and archives is important.

The unashamed attack on one of Northport's finest assets (the Shirley Place) and upon the Dean of All Things Historical in Northport (Marvin Harper) as reported in the article demands rebuttal.

My ancestral roots in this area go back to 1826, the year my great-great-granddaddy, Aaron Amos Boyd, and his wife, Carolina Henry Boyd, moved to Tuscaloosa County from South Carolina.

I owe much to the caring and loving people of Northport. I forever shall thank God for the men and women who taught me at Northport Elementary School and Tuscaloosa County High School, the ministers who guided my spiritual journey and the unnamed individuals who mentored my life. The very least I can do is to cooperate with others who desire to preserve the memory of those who made Northport the place it is today.

I practiced medicine in Northport until my retirement, and I feel that I understand the spirit of our community. We are a proud people; we are a thankful people; we are a caring people; and today, many of us are a disgusted people over the stink regarding Shirley Place and the below-the-belt blow given the 88-year-old man, Marvin Harper, who unselfishly has given so much to our community in the form of historical preservation.

In the past few decades, our nation has awakened to the need of preserve as many as possible of the gems of the past such as Shirley Place — a house built in 1838 that is filled with history, memories, artifacts, books, records and memorabilia.

In 1997, Harper magnanimously deeded his home and its contents to the city of Northport to be used as a museum, open to the public. The city granted him the right to live there until his death. A group of men and women of our community have raised funds and given untold volunteer hours cataloging and inventorying its contents and the plants in its gardens.

It is one of the loveliest sites in Northport, and it would appear that our local officials would show their appreciation for such a commendable deed by shouting forth cheers for such a priceless gift to the city rather than witch hunt for matters that are not constructive.

The Tuscaloosa News article stated that the city of Northport gave Marvin Harper \$25,000 (\$16,324.54 to pay off a mortgage and \$8,181.61 to deposit in his personal account), along with \$100,000 to be placed in a trust earmarked to maintain Shirley Place after his death.

Upon reading the article, I spoke with Mr. Harper, and he stated that the money he received from the city paid for a restoration project that was ongoing at the time. Every dime was put back into renovation. He never realized one cent in his personal account.

Further, the flavor of the news article was that since 2004 Mr. Harper had mooched water and sewage service from the city in the amount of almost \$2,000.

Let us not forget that Shirley Place is a city of Northport-owned house and grounds. It is open for public tours; it is the site of the opening ceremonies of Dickens in Northport each December; it is the location where periodic literacy functions are held (open to the public). For example, within the past few months, the renowned author, Rick Bragg, held a reception there. The latest project at Shirley Place is to make an addition onto the carriage house in the back and turn it

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ECOVIEWS

Interest in environment grows from necessity

The good news and the bad news sometimes come in the same package. A fine example of such irony is a recent survey indicating that people are more concerned about the environment than ever before.

Public interest in the environment is encouraging because, when a large majority of Americans agree on something, the commercial sector and even some politicians eventually move in that direction. So the good news is that people support healthy environments for humans and wildlife and some people are actually working toward positive changes.

The bad news is that environmental conditions have reached a point that such a high level of concern is necessary.

The survey was conducted by



WHIT GIBBONS

Cone, a "strategy and communications agency" that focuses on marketing public relations within the context of corporate responsibility and "in building brand trust."

One of Cone's approaches is to arrange for surveys that track "industry trends ... and corporate attitudes towards companies' involvement with social issues," which is implemented by developing "innovative programs that respond to the needs and passions of consumers."

I translate this to mean "how can a company make more money within a framework of what society views as proper?" This is of course the Ameri-

can way, and one to be encouraged as long as no one gets greedy.

The 2007 Cone Consumer Environmental Survey, based on 1,066 online surveys, revealed some unexpected attitudes, a very important one being that "consumers have high expectations for companies to be environmentally responsible."

Toward this end, a majority believed that companies can and should support the environment in a variety of ways, including reducing pollution through office and manufacturing operations (71 percent), designing environmentally friendly products with minimal packaging (69 percent), and distributing and transporting them more efficiently (69 percent).

One finding I was glad to see was that 59 percent thought companies

should donate money and services to support environmental causes.

A key point about such large percentages of those surveyed who supported reducing pollution, designing environmentally friendly products, and transporting them more efficiently is that current environmental actions by corporate America are clearly viewed as unsatisfactory by a significant majority.

Another telling attitude revealed by the survey is that many individuals "put their money where their mouths are" by taking actions that support the environment. Thus, 62 percent purchase recyclable products; 56 percent buy energy-efficient home improvement products; and 48 percent use environmentally friendly cleaning supplies.

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